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Dare Sloan's Close Call; Or, DEAN DANGERFIELD'S DESPERATE GAME.

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.



SHE SPRUNG TO HER FEET, HER EYES FAIRLY FLASHING WITH ANGER.

Dare Sloan's Close Call.

OR,

Dean Dangerfield's Desperate Game.

BY MAJ. DANGERFIELD BURR.

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE BLOW.

UPON the broad piazza of a house in the far West, a woman paced to and fro, her eyes alternately glancing down the driveway that led to the house and then falling upon the floor, as though entrapt in deepest thought.

There was an air of refinement, and a look of haughty pride about the face of the woman that would have better become one in a drawing-room in the metropolis, than a dweller in what might be almost termed a border home.

Her face was yet beautiful, for the features were cast in a mold of perfection; but to a reader of the human physiognomy one would have discovered there expressions that were not just, lovable and true.

Though perhaps on the verge of two-score years, she yet hardly appeared over thirty, and her form was the perfection of symmetry and grace.

Sue was clad in deep mourning, and yet the look in her glorious eyes was not that of one who was saddened by the death of some dear one.

The house she dwelt in was a substantial frame dwelling, and about it and its surroundings an air of luxury, for the far West.

There were substantial out-houses, broad acres of cultivated lands, meadows dotted with cattle, and altogether it looked like the home of persons who possessed a goodly amount of riches.

Suddenly the lady stopped in her walk, for her eyes had fallen upon a horseman entering the gate leading into the inclosure, some quarter of a mile away.

She sat down upon a rustic seat on the piazza and awaited the coming of this horseman, who was well mounted and rode on at a gallop, his horse showing that he had not tarried by the way.

The rider was a young man of twenty-one, with a splendid physique, great, broad shoulders, and had the general appearance of an athlete.

He was dressed in a riding suit of corduroys, a slouch hat, top-boots, and at his back was slung a repeating-rifle.

He rode with the easy grace of a perfect rider, and raised his hat politely as he drew near the piazza.

His face was darkly bronzed, but cut in a mold of decision, intelligence and nobleness.

Handsome he certainly was, and one, too, to win a man's regard, as well as a woman's love.

"Well, mother, I am back again. I have ridden the ten miles from the post-office station rapidly, for I have bad news for you, I am sorry to say."

And throwing his rein over his saddle, he let his horse go on around to the stables, while he ascended the piazza steps and respectfully kissed the lady on the forehead.

"Bad news, Dare? What can it be? What bad news is there for us to hear?"

"While waiting at the post-office for the letters, I picked up this paper, and by a strange coincidence my eyes fell upon this paragraph," unfolding a paper and reading aloud:

A MAN'S DISHONOR.

"We learn by telegraph that Loyd Lucas, a gentleman of high standing and heretofore undoubted integrity, has fled from his home in S—, having been ruined financially by speculations.

"It has been ascertained that Mr. Lucas was the agent for many estates, and among them the elegant Elmwood Hall property, left in his hands for sale by the owner, Mrs. Dora Sloan, widow of the late Henry Sloan, who was killed in a personal conflict with his neighbor, Darke Dangerfield, of Daisy Dell Manor.

"Mrs. Sloan and her son left Elmwood Hall nearly half a year ago for parts unknown, for they would tell to no one where they were going. Their home Loyd Lucas had in his hands for sale, and only a few days before his departure disposed of it, we learn, for a certain amount in cash by no means its value, the deeds, already signed, having been trusted to his hands by the widow.

"We believe Widew Sloan is, however, a rich woman outside of her Elmwood Hall estate, so that the loss of this property will not leave her destitute.

"Where Lucas has gone no one can tell; but it is supposed that he is already safe in Canada."

Such was what Dare Sloan read to his mother.

She heard it through without a word, and then said bitterly:

"We must find that man, Dare, and bring him to punishment for this crime against us. Fortunately, as the paper says, we have money in bank."

"Still, that does not palliate the crime of Loyd Lucas; but I should have had a letter from the bank about my drafts on it for this place."

"Here is one, mother," and the young man handed over a letter.

Mrs. Sloan broke open the envelope, and her face became livid as she read it.

Her son hastily seized it, and read aloud:

"COMMONWEALTH BANK,
"NEW YORK, May 3d, 18—.

"MRS. DORA DEAN SLOAN:—

"MADAM:—It is my painful duty to inform you that your drafts for ten thousand dollars upon your account in this bank went back unpaid, as unfortunate speculations at the hands of our president have brought us to the verge of ruin.

"Should the bank be able to rally from its financial difficulties, you, being a depositor for a large sum, will be paid every dollar it will be possible to pay you; but, should the bank go under wholly, I regret to say that you will be, with many others, the loser of your entire deposit.

"Up to date your account stands:

"On deposit \$81,000.00
"Interest to date 4,800.00

"Total \$85,800.00

"With sympathy at the misfortune, and the hope that we may recuperate, I remain, madam,

"Respectfully yours,

"WARD IVES, Cashier."

"Dare, we are ruined!" groaned Mrs. Sloan, when her son had read the letter aloud.

"It is a hard blow, mother, and the second one by this mail; but we may recover something."

"No, we are little better than beggars, for we cannot pay for this place, as my drafts have returned, and Elmwood Hall, which would have given us a good support, has been sold by that villain, Loyd Lucas.

"All we have in cash now is a thousand dollars; we can realize as much more by sales of what we do not need now, for we must begin life in an humble way.

"You, Dare, must take a thousand dollars and go East at once.

"First go to New York and see Ward Ives, the cashier of the bank, and learn the truth from him, if ever we are to get anything.

"Then go to W— and see if you can discover anything regarding Loyd Lucas.

"Do this at once, my son, while I pack up here and prepare to move to an humble home.

"I can also decide what is best for our future while you are gone; but, you must go East at once, leaving here at dawn to-morrow morning.

"I will go, mother, and I hope all is not as bad as it now appears; but, should it be, I certainly can take care of you and myself, too, for I am young, strong, and fully able to do so," was the reply of the brave youth who had thus had his inheritance swept from him by a double blow of misfortune.

CHAPTER II.

THE RED WITCH.

ALONG a Western highway a strange-looking being was traveling—a being to attract attention in any land, so odd, so weird was her make-up and general appearance.

It was several days after the departure of Dare Sloan from his Western home for the East, to see if his mother and himself had been made almost beggars by the crimes of others. The person who was traveling along the highway, had halted on a ridge that commanded a view of the Sloan home.

It was a woman, and she was mounted upon an animal in contrast to herself, for it was a splendid beast, as black as jet and yet ridden without any bridle or halter! A lariat was about his neck, the coil hanging upon the horn of the side-saddle. Behind this horse had come to a halt a beautiful mare as white as snow.

This second animal followed, with no rope to lead her. A lariat was about her neck also, and

a pack, covered with an oil-cloth to fully protect it from the weather, was firmly strapped upon the back of the beast, while perched upon it were a parrot and a crow.

In the saddle upon the black horse sat the strange creature to whom I have referred.

She was dressed in a scarlet skirt, men's top-boots armed with spurs, a soldier's jacket with a colonel's epaulettes upon the shoulders, and a slouch hat encircled by a stuffed rattlesnake's skin in lieu of a cord.

She wore a belt of arms, a knife and pair of revolvers, while a rifle was hung to her saddle-horn. In one hand she carried a staff, with which she could guide her horse, and also use as a weapon of offense and defense. It was a stout stick, painted red, with a small hand scythe, used as a crook upon one end, and a saber bayonet upon the other, and from the point to the curve was about eight feet long.

The woman was large, well-formed, and her hair, dropping loosely down her back below her waist, was iron-gray.

Her face was bronzed by exposure, strong in feature, and marked by a look or expression that was dangerous should she be aroused.

Her eyes were sunken, but intensely black and bright, and though fully fifty years of age, her teeth were white as milk and perfect.

Altogether she was a remarkable-looking personage, and her outfit certainly was a novel one.

Two huge dogs had now come up from the rear, one a huge bloodhound, the other a savage-looking mastiff, while, on a knapsack strapped behind her saddle, sat a jet-black cat of enormous size.

Altogether, the woman and her pets were a startling lot to behold.

"That is her house, so I'll camp near," said the woman, in a voice strangely low and musical.

She turned aside from the road, and a ride of a hundred yards brought her to a meadow, through which ran a small stream.

Here she dismounted and took the saddle from one horse, the pack from the other, allowing the animals to drink and feed at will.

A large tree was near at hand, and the strange woman took from her pack three sticks, or poles, two of them five feet long, with iron-spiked ends, the other six feet in length.

The first two were stuck firmly in the ground; the longer one was laid along on the tops; then a small tent was unrolled and stretched over the ridge-pole thus made, and the ends of the canvas fastened down with wooden pins.

A roll of blankets, in an oil-skin, were then spread under the tent, and some cooking-utensils were taken from the pack, the two dogs meanwhile bringing pieces of wood in their mouths and piling them up with evident knowledge that a fire was to be made.

The crow and the parrot had perched themselves in the tree overhead, and the cat was prowling near, looking for wood-mice.

Out of a hamper the woman took a piece of bacon, some potatoes, crackers, and coffee, and, with a fishing-line in a brief time she had caught several fish from the stream, which were soon dressed for frying.

She ate her supper with apparent relish, fed the birds, the dogs and cat, and then lighted a pipe, carved out of white clay, and representing a human skull.

Having finished smoking, she caught her horses and lariated them out near, and taking her staff, with its bayonet and scythe, she left her little camp, a word to the dogs placing them on guard there.

Reaching the highway she turned into it, passed on to the gate leading to the home of the Widow Sloan and her son, and soon approached the house.

It was just sunset, and, as was her wont, Mrs. Sloan was pacing to and fro on the piazza.

Her son had been gone East for some days, and she was alone on the place with the farm hands.

The owner of the place had been there that day, having received back again his draft on the broken bank. She had calmly told him of her misfortunes, and said that she would give the place up to him the moment she had a telegram from her son telling her he could do nothing about recovering their lost riches.

In the mean time, with a feeling that all was lost, she had begun to pack up the few things she cared to take away with her and arrange her other belongings to sell to any one who would buy.

Suddenly she turned in her walk as the words fell upon her ear:

"A good-evening to the Widow Sloan!"

Dora Sloan started, for she had been so lost in reverie she had not noticed the approach of any one.

Then, as her eyes fell upon the strange creature before her, the color fled from her face, while from her lips came the low-spoken words:

"Heaven save me! the Red Witch!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GOLD WITCH.

The laugh of the strange woman, at the words of the Widow Sloan, was a startling one, if it was so full of bitterness and mockery.

"Yes, I am the Red Witch, and we meet again, my fair widow," she retorted, but her voice was not musical now, it was harsh and menacing.

"In Heaven's name, woman, what brought you here?" cried Mrs. Sloan.

"To see you."

"Did you not vow to me, Susan Carr, that you would never again cross my path?"

"Oh, yes, when I wanted money I told you so; but that was when we were back in New York State."

"And what is the difference?"

"Why, you have come West, out here to Iowa, as though you were on my track!"

"I surely am not on your track. I came here to be away from the world with my son, to live by ourselves."

"How strange it is, Dora Sloan, that beautiful lips like yours can lie, for you know you utter that which is false."

"Beware, woman, for I am mistress here!" and an ugly light came into Dora Sloan's eyes.

"No, you are not, and you know it, for today you are little better than a beggar."

"Do you know of this?"

"Oh, yes, for I keep posted about you, Dora Sloan. I know that you came here to get away from the Dangerfields. When you lost Darke Dangerfield, whom you loved with your whole soul, when he cast you off, a poor country girl, for a city heiress, you showed how you could hate him. You bribed me to take his wife's child from her."

"Well, you married Henry Sloan, a good young farmer out of spite, and your child was born at the same time that the Dangerfield boy was. You paid me well for what I did not do, for I lied to you about changing children, and Mrs. Dangerfield having twins and that I gave you one of her boys."

"It was you who had twins, not she. One of your boys died, and the other, Dare Sloan, is your son, as I told you when last we met."

"You, believing him to be Darke Dangerfield's son, had determined to destroy him in the end, in revenge; you hated him; but the moment you knew he was your own child, you loved him, and, because he had saved the life of Darke Dangerfield's daughter, you feared they might love each other, in spite of his father having been slain by the hand of her father, and so you ran away here to hide, leaving no trace of your whereabouts."

"You feared that your son might love Anita Dangerfield, whose father killed your husband, who attacked him in a fit of jealous rage, and whose mother, the heiress for whom Darke Dangerfield cast you off, died suddenly one night—"

"Woman! will you cease your infernal chatter?" suddenly cried Mrs. Sloan, turning upon the Red Witch.

"Oh, yes, when I have had my say, and brought back to you the memory of that night, sixteen years ago, when I was the nurse of Mrs. Dangerfield, and her baby girl, Anita, was only a few days old."

"You know what I saw, that night, how a woman entered the room, a woman who had once dwelt in the Dangerfield mansion, and knew it well, and, entering the sick-chamber, poured poison into the bottle of medicine on the stand by the bedside."

"I kept my secret, for it was valuable to me; but, I became a wanderer, and now am known as the Gold Witch of the mines."

"And I will tell you why, Dora Sloan. I wandered down into the Colorado mining country, and I tell you the miners dreaded me as though I was the veritable Witch of Endor. They believed I had the power to find gold, and they paid me liberally for 'pointers' and fortune-telling."

"One day I struck it rich myself, and I am digging a fortune out of my find."

"When I have gotten a fortune, I will no longer be the Gold Witch, but will go East and enjoy my riches; but it will take me several

years yet, I guess, though gold is plenty in my canyon."

"You see, Dora Sloan, I have one who keeps me posted of things going on East, and so I knew that Loyd Lucas sold your place and ran off with the money, and that the bank failed in which you had your money, so that you had come down almost to beggary."

"I have kept my eye on you, Dora Sloan, not knowing but that I would need you some day to give me more gold, as I had your secret, you know; but I am rich now and you are a beggar, so I come only to see if your pride had broken down under your loss of fortune."

Like a tigress Dora Sloan wheeled upon her.

"No, a thousand times no! My pride remains, and you should not see me cringe or cower, did I lose a hundred fortunes."

"But, woman, fiend, sorceress, or whatever you be, tell me why you have followed me with your accursed hate? It is true I used you as a tool to gain my revenge upon Darke Dangerfield and his wife, and it is equally true that you deceived me, Susan Carr."

"But why? You were well paid, and, since then, when you have demanded gold, you have had it—"

"Because you feared me, knowing what I could bring you to."

"So be it; but why do you dog me with your hate?"

"I have my reason, woman, and a good one it is; but you shall not know it now, no, not now. Some day you shall know; but now I will not tell you."

"I came here simply to see you in your misfortune, Dora Sloan, and to enjoy your misery. I have seen you, so I will go my way again; but we will meet again, yes, again, for if you go to the uttermost parts of the earth, you shall never be free from me, I vow it; yes, by the hate I feel for you, I swear it!" and with a mocking laugh the Gold Witch turned away.

A moment did Dora Sloan stand gazing after her; then she turned and entered the house.

Calling to a servant she said:

"Tell the herder to come here to me, quick."

A few moments after a tall man, with the look of a thorough plainsman, entered the room.

He was dressed like a cowboy, wore a slouch hat, and had a bold, honest face.

"Brandon, you once told my son that you had been a frontier scout."

"Yes, Mrs. Sloan, I was for years a scout, then turned ranchero, but the Indians ran my cattle off; so in bad luck I came here and turned herder for you."

"Can you follow a trail, Buck Brandon?"

"Yes, as well as any man living."

"There was a woman here a while since. She has gone now, but cannot go far to-night, and I wish you to follow her. When you find out where she stops for the night, come back here and I will give you the best horse I have, and you are to trail her to where she lives, only I do not wish her to know it."

"Find out where her home is, Brandon, and I will give you five hundred dollars."

"I will do it, ma'm, for, with that money, and what I have laid up, I can go to Nebraska and start me another ranch. I will go at once, ma'm."

"It is dark, see! Now, can you find her to-night?"

"I have my dog, ma'm, and he'll tree her," was the reply of the ex-scout, and he left the house.

Ten minutes after, with a dog fast to a rope, he was going down the drive toward the gate.

The dog had struck the scent at the piazza, and was on the trail of the Gold Witch.

CHAPTER IV.

TRACKED.

BUCK BRANDON knew his dog had the right trail and would stick to it, so he readily followed his lead, holding on to the lead rope.

The dog kept the scent down the driveway, through the gate leading into the country road, and thence on for nearly a mile to a ridge.

Then it branched off down the hill toward a meadow.

"What, down there, is it? Then she is one of a camping party, I guess," said the cowboy, and soon he came in sight of a glimmering campfire.

The darkness was now intense, but the fire revealed a small camp, and seated in front of a tent, a weird form.

The dog was anxious to go on, but lay down at a low, stern command of his master, who be-

gan to reconnoiter from where he was, when the intense silence was broken by the deep, warning bark of the bloodhound.

It was echoed by the long-drawn-out howl of the other dog, the shrill croaking of the crow, and the loud cry of the parrot:

"Be awake! danger! danger!"

"The devil!" muttered the cowboy, and he beat a hasty retreat, carrying his dog and with his hand clinched over his jaws to prevent his answering the warning barks of those in the camp.

Having gained a point of observation on the ridge, the cowboy saw the woman moving about camp, and also beheld the two huge dogs.

The woman had thrown more wood on the fire, and flaring up, the flames revealed the weird form, the tent, and in the background the horses.

"She is all alone, that is certain, if I can say so when she has dumb beasts for companions; but there is one there that is not dumb, and it sounded like an infernal parrot."

"Why, she looks like Satan's grandmother, and who she can be I should like to know. What can she have wanted up at the house, I wonder?"

"Well, I have tracked her to her camp, so will go back and report to the madam."

He retraced his way to the house and Dora Sloan met him at the piazza steps.

"Well, did you find her?"

"Yes, ma'am, I found her camp, which is over in the Brook Meadow."

"Alone?"

"She has no human critter with her; but there are two immense dogs, two horses, and I heard a parrot chattering and something that sounded like a crow's note of warning."

"She's an odd one, ma'am, and has a snug little tent and looks as comfortable as you please."

"She does not intend to remain there?"

"I suppose not, ma'am."

"Well, Brandon, you must be ready to be on her track by dawn, or whenever she leaves."

"You can take your choice of my horses, and tell Sophy to fix you up all the provisions you need for a long jaunt. I will give fifty dollars for any expenses you may have to incur, and upon your return with exact information as to where the woman has her home, I will pay you the sum I promised."

"I wish to know just where she lives, what she is about, and yet she must not suspect you of being on her track."

"Trust me for that, ma'am, and I'll bring you the correct news; but she's a queer one, and I'd be fearful she was a witch, if I believed in such things."

"She does call herself a witch, and pretends to possess wonderful powers; but, that is all nonsense, of course."

"Yes, ma'am; but I'll go and get ready for my trail."

Buck Brandon in an hour's time was ready for the trail, armed thoroughly, well mounted, with plenty of supplies and his dog, Tease, on hand to accompany him.

He went down toward the road and there waited, staking his horse out and throwing himself down upon his blanket.

Just at dawn Tease awoke him with a low growl, and he heard the sound of hoofs approaching.

Lying quiet, he saw go by in the dim light a horse and rider, and behind trotted a riderless animal.

"Going West," he said to himself, as he held Tease down to keep him from betraying their presence.

Then he arose, and, mounting his horse, rode over to the place where he had seen the little camp.

The fire was burning low, but the place was deserted.

"Take the scent good, Tease, for you have got to help me when I am at fault," said the cowboy; and after a short while passed in the camp, he mounted once more and started upon the trail of the Gold Witch, who was now an hour ahead of him.

He turned into the gate, and riding up to the house, had breakfast and fed his horse and dog.

Mrs. Sloan had just risen as he rode up to the piazza and said:

"I saw her pass at dawn, ma'am, but don't wish to crowd her too close, or I might run upon her camp. I'll find her, though, you may be sure, and soon bring you word."

"I trust you to do so, Brandon," was the earnest reply.

When he had disappeared in the forest, the widow muttered:

"When he finds her, then I will act. I am tired of this life of continual dread of that terrible creature."

"It must end!"

And a cruel smile crossed the face of the handsome woman as she uttered the words that implied—what?

CHAPTER V.

ACCUSED.

ALONG a highway in the State of New York, rode a horseman one dark night, some ten days after the departure of Dare Sloan from his Western home to investigate the truth of the losses that had fallen upon his mother and himself by the crimes of others.

The night was not only intensely dark, but a keen wind was blowing and a steady rain was falling, which caused the horseman to draw his cloak more closely around him and urge his horse onward.

"I hope I will arrive in time to telegraph mother. From all I can learn, we have not a dollar left—which will be sad news for her."

"The office does not close until midnight, I think, and the town is not far away now; but it is too dark for me to see the time."

"Strange that I have not overtaken old Squire Benson, who so foolishly confessed to me that he carried with him twelve thousand dollars in cash."

"He urged me to come on horseback from B—, so as to serve as a protection to him on his way home, and remain at his house with him to-night."

"Otherwise I would have taken the train at B—, and long since have been in N—."

"He promised to ride slow so that I would overtake him, but I have been unable to do so, fast as I have ridden."

As the horseman spoke, half-aloud, he entered a dense forest through which the road ran.

A few minutes after there came the sharp crack of a pistol, a wild cry of pain and fright, and then the rapid clatter of hoofs.

A moment after two horsemen dashing along the road came upon a strange scene.

A man lay on the rain-drenched earth, dead, and his horse stood near him.

A second horse stood near, and his rider bent over the prostrate form of the dead man.

"He is dead, that is certain, so I must take his money and valuables."

"Then I will go and—"

He ceased speaking as the two horsemen dashed up, almost coming upon the scene like magic, so silently had they appeared.

"Ho! what is this?" cried one, sternly.

"A man has been murdered, sir."

"I heard the shot and cry, and rode rapidly to this spot to find him dying, and he asked me to take charge of his money and valuables, so I—"

"No, that won't do, my man, for you are the murderer and our coming surprised you."

"Hold! resist and we kill you!"

"By Heaven! do you dare call me a murderer? Do you know whom you accuse?" cried the accused young man angrily.

"No, we do not know, and we do not care who you are. We heard the shot, and the cry for aid, so rode here with all haste and find you robbing the dead. We are armed, so if you resist you die."

The young man did not resist. He simply stood still and the others dismounted and seized him.

They found a revolver upon him and took possession of it, and with the reins of the dead man's horse tied the prisoner's arms securely.

"Now, Hal, you remain with the body, while I go on to jail with this murderer. I will then send a coroner to the scene."

"Mount your horse, sir!"

The prisoner obeyed, with the aid of his captors, as his hands were bound behind him, and the two rode off together.

In half an hour they had reached the town, and as the gas-lamps flashed in the face of the prisoner, his captor cried in a startled tone:

"My God! are you not Dare Sloan?"

"I am, and I recognized you also, Mr. Dangerfield. You can now understand that I am not guilty of murdering poor Squire Benson, and that my innocence alone permitted me to allow you and your comrade to arrest me for the crime."

"My dear fellow, I certainly feel sorry for you, and, as I owe my life to you, and the lives of others dear to me, on an occasion you doubtless well remember, I would gladly release you; but, as it is, I must deliver you up, and I trust you can prove your innocence

to others, as I of course can do nothing in the matter."

"I ask no favors of you, Mr. Dangerfield, and I do not think others will believe me guilty."

They had now reached the jail, and to the officer in charge Dean Dangerfield gave his prisoner, with the words:

"My friend Hal Burton and myself were returning from a hunt over in the river-bottom, when we heard a shot and a cry for help."

"We rode up and found this young gentleman standing over the body of a man who, he says, is Squire Benson."

"He was found under circumstances that caused us to arrest him; but it is Mr. Dare Sloan, formerly of Elmwood Hall, so there must be some mistake."

"My friend Burton is in the forest near Gaines's mill with the body."

"I am sorry to see you in a suspicious plight, Mr. Sloan, for I remember you well, and your father was my friend; but I must do my duty, and I only hope you can make your way out of this trouble," remarked the chief of police, in a tone of sympathy, and turning to Dean Dangerfield, he continued:

"You will lead my men to the scene, Mr. Dangerfield, I hope?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

Dare Sloan was then led to a cell, and he remarked:

"I had taken this package of money from Squire Benson, and his watch and chain, intending to come after help and not wishing to leave them on the body, should some one come upon him while I was away."

"Here they are. I believe there is twelve thousand dollars in that envelope, but how much in his pocketbook I do not know, so you had better examine it."

The chief shook his head. The words of the young man had set him to thinking; but he took the money, pocketbook and watch and chain, and leaving Dare Sloan behind iron bars, returned to his office.

There he placed money and watch in his safe, while Dean Dangerfield, who awaited him there, observed:

"I suppose I should give you this, for it is the revolver I took from Sloan."

"There is an empty chamber in it, too."

"Ah! that looks bad; but I hope Sloan can prove his innocence, black as all appears against him, for you know he once saved my life, and twice did he save the life of my sister."

"I heard something about it; but I will put this revolver with the other things and go with you myself," replied the chief.

Soon after the patrol-wagon rolled away from the police station, and Hal Burton was found keeping his lonely vigil by the dead.

The chief of police asked him a few questions and then relieved him from duty.

"You will stay with me to-night, Hal, for Daisy Dell Manor is nearer than your home," said Dean Dangerfield, as the chief told them they could go, but to report at his quarters in town the next morning at nine o'clock.

"Yes," was the reply, and the two friends rode off together in the still pouring rain.

CHAPTER VI.

A GLANCE AT THE BYGONE.

DAISY DELL MANOR had originally been known as Daisy Dell Farm, when it had belonged to Farmer Ezra Dean, thought to be at the time of his death the richest man in the county.

He, his wife and daughter Dora had comprised the family, and the farm had belonged to his kindred for generations, and their graves were over on the ridge, not far from the grand old mansion.

Dora, a beautiful girl, and supposed heiress, found herself, at the death of her parents, poor, and, deserted by her rich city lover, Darke Dangerfield, she had become the wife of Henry Sloan, an honest young farmer on the neighboring farm known as Elmwood Hall.

Loving his wife to idolatry, Henry Sloan yet knew that she had loved another; but he sought to win her to him, and so had arranged to purchase Daisy Dell and give it back to her.

But in stepped his old rival, Darke Dangerfield, who had married an heiress, and bought the place right before him almost.

This engendered bad blood, especially as the Dangerfields fitted up the farm magnificently, brought their servants in livery and drove grand turnouts.

Then, too, they changed the name to Daisy Dell Manor.

Not to be outdone, Henry Sloan changed Elmwood Farm to Elmwood Hall, added to the

house, handsomely furnished it and purchased a handsome carriage and horses for his wife.

One day it was said that Dora Sloan and Darke Dangerfield met in the little cemetery, and what passed between them no one knew; but Henry Sloan waylaid his enemy on the way home, there was an interchange of shots and the former was killed.

The master of Daisy Dell Manor gave himself up, told how he had been attacked, and, acting in self-defense, had been forced to kill Henry Sloan, and so he was set free, with the life of the former upon his conscience.

To each family had been born a son, Dean Dangerfield and Dare Sloan, and when the lads were a few years old a daughter had come to the home of Darke Dangerfield.

But when the baby girl was but a few weeks old the mother died, suddenly and somewhat mysteriously, for she had been supposed to be out of danger, and the widower was left with his two children.

But Darke Dangerfield seldom remained at Daisy Dell Manor, for leaving his children under the care of a nursery governess, he devoted his time to traveling about the world.

His son, Dean, grew up to be a wild youth, without a father's watchful eye upon him, and having been dismissed from the Military Academy was sent to Daisy Dell Manor to manage the estate.

Anita, his sister, on the contrary, was a most lovely girl, winning the hearts of all who knew her.

Dare Sloan had been kept constantly at school, or traveling, by his mother, who lived a life of exile at Elmwood Hall, seeing no one but her servants, until she became known as The Hermitess of Elmwood.

Returning from one of his jaunts out West, on one occasion, Dare Sloan saved the life of Anita Dangerfield, for the boat on which they were passengers took fire, and she was returning from visiting a school friend, and was to meet her father in Buffalo.

When he took her to her father Dare Sloan only then discovered who it was that he had saved, and he was unknown to them, he was glad to see.

Returning home to visit his mother, he had, some time after, saved Anita again, when she and a school friend, with Dean Dangerfield, who was driving, had been run away by a spirited pair of horses, and, but for the coming upon the scene of Dare Sloan and his pluck, would have been dashed to death.

Not long after this the Widow Sloan and her son suddenly and mysteriously left Elmwood Hall, going no one knew whither, except the agent they had left behind to sell the estate.

People wondered at the departure of the beautiful Hermitess of Elmwood and her son, but no one seemed to be able to give a reason.

Even Dare himself could not understand his mother's sudden going; but he yielded, and they sought the home in the far West where the reader has seen them, seemingly hiding away from their fellow-beings who had ever known or heard of them before.

But the words of Susan Carr, the nurse, who had become known in the Colorado mines as the Gold Witch, had hinted at the reason of Dora Sloan's sudden flight from her old home.

She had hinted that Dare, whom she had not believed was her son, had, when he was known to be her own flesh and blood, become most dear to her—her idol, in truth; and, fearing that he would love Anita Dangerfield, she had run off with him to get him far from all danger.

She knew that it would never do for her son and Darke Dangerfield's daughter to love each other, and mayhap some day wed.

No, it would not do for those two to clasp hands across two graves, the father of one, the mother of the other.

And so Dora Sloan had fled far away with her son.

But the loss of her riches had allowed her to forget danger to Dare from Anita's bright eyes, and she had sent him back to the old home to see if really it was lost to them.

He had gone there and, when almost beneath the shadow of Elmwood Hall, he had been accused of the murder of an old man and thrown into prison with circumstantial evidence appearing against him in a way that it would be hard indeed to prove his innocence of the crime charged upon him.

CHAPTER VII.

NO HOPE.

THE morning came with little hope to Dare Sloan, for the town was greatly excited over the murder of Squire Benson.

The coroner's jury had met, and the story of Dean Dangerfield and his friend, Hal Burton, had been told before them.

They had been over in the river-lands hunting, and had been detained by the rain.

As it did not slack up, they had started home, heard a shot as they were seeking shelter under a tree in the forest from a downfall of rain and riding forward came upon two horses, the form of Squire Benson upon the ground and Dare bending over him.

The heir of Daisy Dell seemed not willing to give any testimony that would criminate Dare Sloan, and people understood that he owed him his life; but Hal Burton told a straight narrative, and what he said pointed to the fact that the murderer of the squire was the young man found by his side.

With this circumstantial evidence against him, Dare Sloan was held for trial on the charge of murder.

He seemed almost incredulous at first, and then deeply moved.

"Whom will you have for your lawyer, Mr. Sloan?" asked the chief of police.

"I hardly know what to say or do; but I must have some one to defend me, or they will surely prove me guilty of this crime."

"Yes, appearances are strongly against you, so my advice is to get your lawyer, lay out your defense, and secure all proof you can to show you are innocent."

"Well, I will send for Lawyer Verdan. He was my father's friend; but I have little money to pay him; in fact, my mother and myself are almost penniless now."

He then sent for the lawyer, and having already telegraphed his mother that there was no chance of getting back a dollar of their money lost by the bank failure, and that their agent had indeed sold Elmwood Hall for cash and decamped with the money, he sat down and wrote her as follows:

"Last night I heard a shot as I was riding through the forest, and came upon a man lying by the roadside dying."

"It was Squire Benson, whom I had met at S—, and who told me he had a large amount of money and was going through on horseback, asking me to accompany him, telling me to join him at the Rock Spring Tavern."

"I went there and he was gone, for I was detained in getting a horse, and following, after nightfall I came upon him, as I said, dying by the roadside."

"He asked me to take his money and valuables, and died before he told me what to do with them."

"It was just then that two persons came upon me, and I was arrested as the murderer of the squire and put in jail; but of course I can prove my innocence, and will then return to you to see what is best for us to do."

Such was the tenor of the letter of Dare Sloan to his mother, which was duly mailed.

Lawyer Verdan called at the jail soon after and warmly greeted his client.

"Dare, my poor boy, I am sorry to see you in this trouble, for I cannot believe you guilty; but we will talk it over and see what can be done to get you free."

"I have about five hundred dollars, Mr. Verdan, and half of it I will give to you; but I will need the balance when I get out, for Loyd Lucas has robbed us of our home, and I suppose you know that the bank failed and mother lost every dollar deposited there?"

"The deuce! I had not heard of this."

"Yes, sir, we are about beggars," said Dare bitterly.

"Then keep your money, my boy, and I'll see you through without pay, or at least trust to your paying me some day; but, Dare, let us not hide matters, but be honest with each other, and I tell you your loss of property at this time goes against you."

"I have some money, sir, as I said, and—"

"You do not understand me; I mean that, as you have been made poor, it looks as though you had tried to get old Benson's money—hold on, I say it looks so, and the district attorney will so try and use it against you."

"Now all seems against you in this affair, so tell me how you met Benson?"

"At S—, where I remained over to see a cousin of Loyd Lucas's. He told me he had collected a large sum of money, and purchased two horses, so wished me to go with him on horseback, instead of by rail to N—, and ride one of his horses."

"I promised and went after the horse, but found, on reaching Rock Spring Tavern, it had gone on, so I tried to overtake him."

"My horse lost a shoe and that detained me, and I gave up overtaking the squire, so rode slowly on toward N—, when, after nightfall, I heard a shot and came upon him."

"My coming frightened away his murderer, and as he was dying he told me to take his money and valuables, and could say no more."

"I did so, and just then Dangerfield and Burton came up, and of course it did look as though I was guilty."

"It looks devilishly so, my poor boy," bluntly said the old lawyer. "But in spite of appearances I take you as innocent, and we will do all we can to save you."

"Now tell me why your mother left Elmwood Hall in such a mysterious way?"

"She wished to go away from scenes that gave her only sorrow, and so I said nothing against it."

"And where is she now?"

"West."

"That is indefinite."

"She asked me to give to no one her address."

"Ah, my boy, it is all owing to this love affair of her girlhood. She met that handsome fellow, Dangerfield, and idolized him; she refused me, I frankly tell you, Squire Benson and others, and was engaged to Dangerfield."

"But a break came between them, though who was at fault I do not know, and she married your father, and she made him a good wife, too."

"Poor woman! I feel for her, for I knew her joyous nature, and how deeply she must have suffered to make a hermitess of herself as she did."

"Now you say she is West, and you have lost your riches?"

"Well, worse than that is your present trouble, Dare, and it seems hard indeed that your accuser is the son of the man who, right or wrong, took your father's life, and who, I learn, you saved from death."

"But, Dare, I am an old bachelor; I have ample means, and, by Heaven! they shall not hang you if I can help it with the wits I am blessed with and the pocketbook I can call my own; so keep up heart, my boy, and we will win yet."

"Now I will see that you are as comfortable as you can be made here in this dismal place, and I'll see you often, and get your trial set for the earliest moment possible," and the good old lawyer, an old lover of Dora Dean's in her girlhood, and still true to his first and only love, left her son alone with his bitter meditations.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL.

The day of trial came around, and the courthouse was densely packed by a crowd of curious people, anxious to see a man tried for his life, and who had taken the life, all believed, of a fellow-being.

There was, too, a mystery about the young prisoner which had been engendered by his mother's strange life as an exile at Elmwood Hall.

Dare Sloan had never attended school in the country near Elmwood, or in the town, so he was positively a stranger there almost.

The mysterious departure of himself and mother, the flight of Loyd Lucas with the money he had received for their home, the loss of their money in the bank's failure, all added to the interest in the case.

Then his return by night, and the death and robbery of Squire Benson made matters look very gloomy for Dare Sloan.

So it was that the day of trial the court-room was densely packed with eager, excited, curious humanity.

Dare Sloan was calm and unmoved, though his face was pale.

He sat next to his lawyer, and the eyes of all were upon him.

The trial was opened without delay, and a jury was obtained after some difficulty, for Lawyer Verdan was very anxious to get intelligent men only.

The first witness called was Dean Dangerfield.

He told his story simply, as he had made it known to the jury, and again there seemed a desire to shield the prisoner all in his power, and this Dare Dean appeared to notice.

Then Hal Burton was called.

He had more to say, and did not appear to be influenced by any motive to aid the prisoner.

It was as though he wished to tell the whole truth as it was.

The story was of how, when the rain suddenly poured down in torrents, they, Dean Danger-

field and himself, returning from hunting, had sought shelter beneath a massive oak on the roadside, hoping the drenching rain would soon cease.

Then a shot had been heard and a cry of murder, and they had dashed out to see what the trouble was, and had come upon the accused bending over the dead body of Squire Benson, who had just breathed his last.

The accused had taken the money and valuables from the body and said that Squire Benson had so told him to do.

They knew not who the prisoner was then, but believing him the murderer, they had arrested him.

The revolver of the accused was then shown by the chief of police, and one of the chambers was empty, and the bullet taken from the dead man fitted it exactly.

The face of the prisoner paled more at this testimony regarding his pistol, but said nothing.

The chief of police was then called, and he made known the fact of the prisoner having been brought to the jail at night, and that he had said he had met Squire Benson in S— and been asked to accompany him to N— on horseback.

Also that he had arrived at the Rock Spring Tavern after the squire had left, and had tried to overtake him.

Then the chief went on to say that he had been sent down to S— to obtain what clues he could against the accused, and he had found that the prisoner had called with an order for the squire's horse and ridden him away.

The order was produced and written in pencil, but it was said to have been a forgery of the squire's writing and name.

At the Rock Spring Tavern the chief found that the squire had stopped to water his horse, and then had gone on his way without leaving any word as to any one following after him.

The prosecuting attorney then proved that the prisoner had always been an odd personage, associating with no one, and that he had departed with his mother for parts unknown.

Finding that they had been defrauded by their agent, and lost all through the failure of the bank, the young man had put in an appearance near his old home, met old Squire Benson on the train, gotten off at S— with him, secured a horse the squire had purchased some days before and ridden on after him to waylay him, murder and rob him.

The attorney then went on to say that the will of Squire Benson had been made known through being handed in to probate and that he had left his fortune to "Dare Sloan, son of the woman I so dearly loved in her youth—Dora Dean—now the widow of Henry Sloan."

All started at this. It gave another reason for the killing of the squire by Dare Sloan, for by his death he would get a fortune fully equal to what had been lost through Loyd Lucas and the bank!

"Now, gentlemen of the jury," continued the attorney, "the case is as clear as noonday against the prisoner. He met old Squire Benson on the train, told him of his misfortunes, and learned in turn that he was the heir of his intended victim. They stopped at L—, and the prisoner at once determined to follow his victim, kill and rob him. The money the squire had with him would be ample to last him until he came into his legacy, and no one would suspect him of the crime; but he was discovered in the act and now stands before you for you to pronounce upon his guilt."

It was evident to Lawyer Verdan that the case was against his client. The evidence was so damning that he could see no way to refute it; so he let the prisoner tell his own story.

Dare arose and in a voice that reached every ear, with a look that was fearless and an expression of honesty that seemed to weigh in his favor with some, told how he had met the squire, who seemed ill and anxious.

That he had begged him to stop over at S— and go on with him on horseback, and, sending his baggage by the train, he had done so.

The squire had written a note in pencil for the horse, while he rode on; but the animal was in the pasture and had to be brought in, and then a bridle and saddle purchased by the squire had not been sent to the stable, and there was another delay to send after it.

At last he had started on after the squire and had overtaken him by night, when he heard the pistol-shot, and whoever the murderer had been, his coming had run him off.

"Did you know the squire had a large sum of money with him?" he was asked.

"Yes, for he told me so, and said for that reason he wished to return by road, for he

spoke of having been dogged by some one, but who it was he did not mention, if he knew."

"Did you know that you were to be his heir?"

"I did not, though he had asked me to his home and told me that he had an important secret to tell me, and that I need not fret about losing my fortune."

"But about the shot from your pistol?"

"I thought each barrel was loaded; but how it came that one shot had been fired off I do not know."

Then Lawyer Verdan made his speech, and a most eloquent one it was.

He admitted that circumstantial evidence pointed to the guilt of the prisoner; but so many innocent men had been hanged on just such evidence, he begged the jury to bring in a verdict of not guilty where there was a doubt of guilt.

The jury listened to the charge of the judge, and it pointed to the prisoner's guilt.

Then, without leaving their seats, they gave their verdict.

It was:

"Guilty!"

CHAPTER IX.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

BACK to his cell, condemned to die on the gallows, went Dare Sloan from the court-room.

All deemed it a fair trial and a just finding, for no one seemed to doubt the guilt of the prisoner.

All the testimony given seemed to point toward his having committed the crime.

Lawyer Verdan asked him if he wished to make an appeal.

"No, it would do no good, for they are certain of my guilt and will hang me," was the response.

"What about your mother?"

"Alas! she seems to have deserted me, in my misfortune, for my letters have remained unanswered, and you sent two telegrams to the station nearest to her home."

"Yes, and I must tell you, my poor boy, that the answer came back that Mrs. Sloan had left her home, going no one knew where."

"She may have started here."

"Yet she has had weeks to come in and has not arrived."

"Then some misfortune has befallen her, for my mother would not desert me in my time of direst need, Mr. Verdan."

"So I would think, from what I know of her nature."

"I will send a special messenger to see if I can find her—nay, I will go myself, for this is a case where I should do so, and you know, my poor boy, your day of execution is not far off."

"I know it, sir, and as I now feel, deserted by all except you, I do not dread it, if only it was not to die upon the gallows."

The lawyer left that night for the West, with directions from Dare just how to find his home.

Thus the days dragged their weary length along, and the day of execution was only a few weeks away.

Two weeks passed away, and at last the lawyer returned.

During his absence the chief of police had been the only friend the poor prisoner had.

He had said to him:

"Somehow, Mr. Sloan, against all appearances of your guilt, I do not believe you guilty."

"It is here in my heart that you are not, and I cannot get it out, so I wish to do all I can for you, at least."

The cell was made more comfortable, the food was brought to the prisoner from the best hotel in the place, and he was given books, a guitar, on which he played most skillfully, and drawing materials, for he sketched well, with which to amuse himself.

Calm and ever courteous, Dare Sloan won the respect and regard of all in the jail, and his utter fearlessness was remarked by every one.

One day the lawyer came in, not unexpectedly, for he had been looked for daily.

His face showed at once that his mission had been unsuccessful.

"You did not see my mother, sir?" said Dare, after he had greeted him.

"No, nor could I learn where she had gone."

"She had left the house?"

"Yes, two weeks after your departure."

"Had given up the place?"

"Yes, so the owner told me, and sold out her furniture and all."

"And he could give you no clue as to where she had gone?"

"No; only he said that she had your telegram that there was not a dollar to be gotten from Lucas or the bank, but you would remain awhile to see if aught could be done."

"Then she had sold out her household effects and departed."

"Alone?"

"She had gone off in her carriage, driven by a cowboy by the name of Brandon."

"Ah, yes, I know him, for he was our cattle-herder."

"Then I tried to track her, and did so as far as the station, where she had sold her carriage and horses and parted with the cowboy, who had taken the train West, and she also, I believe, but I could not find out; but, here are your letters to her, which were at the farm, and one to you that was left by her with the owner."

"Anxious to find her, I opened the letter and here it is."

Eagerly did Dare Sloan read the letter, which was as follows:

"MY DEAR SON:—

"Your telegram tells me that we are little else than beggars, so I give up this place, its cattle and all we had purchased, and depart to find a new home."

"Upon your return, go to the ranch of Buck Brandon where you once spent a couple of months hunting, and if you do not find a letter from me there, await the coming of one."

"With hope that all may yet be well,

"Your devoted

"MOTHER."

"In vain did I try to find out where the ranch of this man Brandon was, but no one seemed to know, for they said he had come there with you."

"Yes, and his home is in Nebraska, and it would take weeks to get there; and more, I know that he had given it up; but still, mother might have gone to that vicinity, while Brandon, no longer working for us, doubtless returned there."

"Then we must send there."

"No, my good friend, the place could not be reached under two weeks, if indeed a messenger could find it."

"Then mother would doubtless not be there, from her letter, and it would take time to look for her where she has gone."

"Then comes the return, so you see it would be too late, and perhaps it is better so."

"She will not have to suffer suspense, and all will be over when she knows the worst."

"When I am gone, take my money and go to Brandon's ranch, for I will give you full directions for reaching there, and tell her all."

"I will tell her how you defended me, my dear friend, and you must do all you can to cheer her up and see if you cannot regain something of her lost fortune for her, so that she will not want in her declining years."

"She shall never want for anything, I pledge you, my boy," and the lawyer hastily turned away and brushed a tear from his eyes.

He had done all in his power for the prisoner, and so could only await the fatal day when all would be over.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNBELIEVER.

IN a grand city mansion, furnished with every luxury that wealth could buy, and with the air of a home of an aristocrat, sat a young and beautiful girl, idly running her fingers over the keys of a piano.

Her voice, as she now and then sung snatches of songs, was rich and musical, and her touch was skillful and sympathetic as she played her accompaniment.

"Very young, for she was not over eighteen, she was yet possessed of a perfect form, while her face was one of striking loveliness, and indicative of conscious pride, power, and withal stamped with the nobility of womanhood."

She was dressed with rare taste, and seemed to be idling her time away as though awaiting the coming of some one.

A sharp ring at the door bell sent the liveried butler to answer it, and a moment after there entered the room a young man in traveling coat and hat.

"Brother, I am glad to see you. I had dinner delayed upon receiving your telegram," she said, as she kissed him affectionately.

"Well, Sis, I'll run up and brush off the dust and join you at once in the dining-room, and after dinner we will have a long talk."

Ten minutes after Dean Dangerfield joined his sister at dinner.

It was a dinner fit for a set company, with silver service, iced wines and liveried attendants, for Darke Dangerfield, a millionaire, lived like a prince.

"The governor is away, of course, for I had a line from him saying he was going West to see about some mining stock he was largely interested in."

"Yes; father left two weeks ago, and a letter received yesterday said he would be gone for six weeks or more, and, as he was going far from mail stations, not to expect another soon."

"I only wish that he was here; but you will have to act in his place, Sis."

"In what way, brother?"

"I'll tell you later," and, after dinner, the two adjourned to the library.

"Heard from Kate Kennerley lately, Sis?" asked Dean Darrington, as he threw himself down upon a lounge and lighted a cigar.

"Yes, I correspond regularly with her."

"Suppose she spoke of me?"

"No; she never refers to you now, brother."

"And just because I was a trifle wild, and got into a financial scrape, she refused me."

"You should have acted differently to have won Kate, brother."

"Why, I had to sow my wild oats, for all boys of spirit do; but, I'll win her yet."

"I doubt it, Dean."

"You see if I don't; but, have you read the papers of late from N—?"

"No, I seldom look at them."

"Then you do not know that the devil has been to pay there of late."

"Ah, brother! what act have you been guilty of now?"

"Dare Sloan."

Anita Dangerfield started at this, and her face paled, but, the cigar smoke and a liberal quantity of wine at dinner, dimmed the eyesight of her brother so that he failed to see it.

"What has Mr. Sloan done?" she asked calmly.

"Killed old Squire Benson, and—"

A low moan broke from the lips of the young girl, but still she asked, calmly:

"Do you mean that Mr. Sloan has committed murder?"

"Yes, and that is not all."

"What more can he have done?"

"He robbed him afterward, has been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death."

"It is false! false I say, Dean Dangerfield, for Dare Sloan was never guilty of an act so cruel and criminal."

She sprang to her feet as she spoke, fairly frightening her brother, and her eyes flashed with anger.

"It is so true, Sis, that Dare Sloan now lies under sentence of death in the jail at N—, and in two weeks from next Friday he is to hang."

"I did all in my power to save him, but the facts were against him, and even old Lawyer Verdan could not prove him innocent."

"Brother, tell me all about this case."

"That is the way with you women; you never read the papers, other than the marriages, deaths, and fashion notes, so you know nothing of what is going on."

"Why, I wondered why you did not come down to N— and try and save the young man who twice saved your life, for it would be just like you."

"Yes, and he saved your life, Dean, and kept you from having the lives of Kate and myself upon your conscience, for your recklessness in driving us out with that wild pair of horses; but tell me of this sad affair, for again I say I do not believe Dare Sloan guilty."

"The jury and the judge thought so, and so that ends it; but I'll tell you how I tried to testify to save him, for I did not wish him hanged, though Hal Burton told all he knew about the affair."

"And what had you and your very fast friend, Hal Burton, whom you know I despise, to do with it?"

"Oh, we found Sloan standing over the dead body of the squire."

"Where?"

"Within a few miles of N—."

"I thought Mr. Sloan had gone away, never to return?"

"So it was thought by all in N—; but Loyd Lucas sold Elmwood and skipped off with the money, and then the Commercial Bank

failed, in which the Sloans had all their wealth deposited, and Dare came East to see about it all, met up with old Benson, and—

"Pray tell me now how this most unfortunate young man came to be accused of the murder of Squire Benson," and Anita Dangerfield spoke in a tone that was almost disagreeable.

Then Dean Dangerfield told her all, from the coming of Hal Burton and himself upon the dead body of Squire Benson, with Dare Sloan bending over it, up to the end of the trial.

"And you and Mr. Hal Burton are the only witnesses?"

"What others do you wish, sister?" angrily asked the young man.

"How did Mr. Sloan's statement agree with yours?"

"Perfectly."

"He admitted all as it occurred?"

"Yes."

"But denied that he was guilty?"

"Yes."

"And did any one believe him innocent?"

"Well, I tried to think so. His lawyer, Verdan, swears that he is not guilty, and the chief of police says he thinks it is a case of circumstantial evidence; but there is no clue as to who could have done the killing if Sloan did not, and so it stands."

"And his mother?"

"Is not there?"

"Where is she?"

"Heaven only knows, for though she has been written to, telegraphed for, and Verdan went after her, she is not to be found, for she left her home soon after Dare came East."

"She is a strange woman."

"Yes, strange indeed."

"Brother Dean?"

"Yes, Anita."

"I do not believe that Dare Sloan is guilty."

"But—"

"I care nothing for all the evidence, and repeat it, that I do not believe Dare Sloan guilty of this murder," was the firm response of the beautiful girl.

CHAPTER XI.

AN APPEAL.

FOR some minutes after Anita Dangerfield had expressed her disbelief of the guilt of Dare Sloan no word was spoken between the brother and sister to break the silence.

Then Anita suddenly asked:

"Well, brother, how are affairs at Daisy Dell Manor?"

"Sis, that is just what I came to the city to see you about."

"Well?"

"It is not well, for I am in debt."

"There is no reason for it, Dean, for father sent you there to live and gave you the income of the place."

"Let me see: the income, when the agent managed it, while we were at school and father abroad, was some six thousand dollars above taxes and all expenses of servants and everything, in fact, pertaining to the estate."

"It is as much now; but somehow I get behind."

"With your living and six thousand dollars a year, you should not, for you have only your clothes to buy, as the cellar is stocked with wines and liquors, and your groceries are sent from the city, and I paid your bill, with ours, two days ago."

"I cannot help it, Sis, for I get behind, and am now fifteen thousand dollars in debt."

"Brother!"

"It is true; and I've got to have the money, for my notes in bank come due within the week, and must be paid."

"I do not see where you can get the money to pay them."

"From father, for he will have to come to my aid."

"He is not to be reached now, as I told you."

"Well, you must help me out."

"I cannot."

"Why, your check is as good at the bank as father's, for I know he told them to honor your checks against his account, the same as his own."

"True, but that was for all household and incidental expenses, and for what I might wish for myself."

"Do you know what his deposit is at present?"

"He has accounts in several banks."

"Well, has he not got fifteen thousand on deposit in any one?"

Anita arose, unlocked a drawer of her father's desk, and took out several bank books.

"Yes, he has twenty-two thousands in the Safety, as much more in the Third City, and

thirty-three in the Mammoth, with some seven hundred in the Grocers."

"Then give me the check I need."

"I cannot."

"If you will, I will return it to you within two weeks."

"You will have to give new notes to do so, and it will not help you."

"No."

"Then you trust to gambling to get out of your scrape and that is the way your money is thrown away, while Hal Burton and a number of other pretended friends, live on you."

"I did not come here to be lectured, Anita; but, I tell you frankly, I must have that money, with which to take up these notes."

"I cannot give it to you."

"You must."

"It is not mine, Dean, and father might draw at any time on his bank accounts."

"The bank would make his check good, if it came in, and there were no funds there, for I have heard him say he has often overdrawn twenty thousand at a time."

"I cannot do what you ask, Dean."

"Sister," and the face of the young man was white and anxious now.

"I must make a confession to you, and show you the position I am in."

"It is a very sad and unfortunate one, brother."

"The notes will have to go to protest."

"Well?"

"And hurt father's credit."

"How can that be?"

"As indorser."

"Brother, father has never indorsed a note for you, as he never knew you got such accommodations."

"Sister, I must throw myself upon your mercy, for I must confess to you, and with shame, that I indorsed these notes in father's name, for otherwise I could not have gotten the money, and I was being pressed desperately for gambling debts."

"Brother! brother! this is terrible, for you confess yourself a forger," and Anita buried her face in her hands.

"I know all that I have done, sister, and I have come to you for your help and sympathy."

"I know that you are aware, better than is father, of what money he has, and you could spare me the fifteen thousand and he know nothing about it."

"Do this for me and save me."

Anita was silent a moment, and then said:

"Tell me just what you owe."

"It is considerable."

"Remember, I must know the truth, for I shall pay the bills, not you."

"But, sister—"

"If I help you, it shall be in my own way."

"You will compromise me, and—"

"No, for you can let it be known that you are called off suddenly, and, as I am going to run down to Daisy Dell, I will pay your bills. Now what do you owe?"

"But I am not going away."

"You certainly are, for father has written for you to come West, and I intended writing you when I got your telegram."

"But I will not go West."

"Then the law must take its course with you."

"Do you know what that means?"

"Imprisonment."

"It does; and you will see me go to prison?"

"Why not now, when it will soon come to it?"

"Why, brother, father has paid for you in the past ten years, since you were a mere boy, over one hundred thousand dollars, half of which was for gambling debts."

"He gave you every chance to redeem yourself at Daisy Dell, and he knows how wild a life you have led there, for the man you discharged has been here."

"That infernal valet of mine, Screws, whom I discharged for giving a champagne supper to his friends, when he thought I was not coming back that night."

"Why, Sis, they had as fine a spread as was ever set out at the Manor, with our wines and all, and Screws wore my dress suit, the butler had discarded his livery and had an old rig on of father's, and the cook and girls were rigged out in our poor dead mother's finery which had been in the trunks for long years."

"The silver service was all out, toasts were drank, the Scotch coachman was playing on his infernal bagpipe for them to dance by, and such a circus you never saw as I walked in."

"I was drunk, I confess it, and so I whipped out my revolver and began to fire at random,

and the party broke up with a haste that was ludicrous.

"I discharged them all the next morning, and Screws has been here with his stories, has he?"

"Yes, and told all, even to what he had done; but he said that your life gave them all an example, and they followed it, as you had had drunken orgies there time and again with very questionable people as guests to say the least."

"Well, I have gone it rather strong, but I am sorry and I come to you for help, and you will hear my appeal."

"On one condition!"

"Name it."

"That you remain here, give me a list of your debts, and I go to N— and pay all you owe," was the determined reply of Anita.

CHAPTER XII.

A RASCAL.

"You are terribly hard on me, Anita, but I am in a hole, so must submit; but, after that?"

"You must at once go West and join father for he will give you another chance."

"And that is?"

"As manager of his mines out there."

"I do not like the idea."

"Then arrange as best you can."

"I thought you did not know where to find father?"

"Go to where he told me to write him, and his agent there can doubtless tell you."

"I will need money."

"I will give you five hundred to fit out for the trip and take you there."

"Well, I'll have to submit; but the governor will be furious."

"You must expect his just anger, of course."

"I'll face it out, so here goes. Get your pencil and paper."

She obeyed, and he said:

"One note in bank—ten thousand."

"And the others?"

"That is all, for I said more as I needed a margin for pin-money."

"Ah, brother! but continue."

"Brown, the tailor, six hundred."

"Yes."

"Burke, the bootmaker, sixty."

"I have it."

"Vane, twenty-five."

"Well?"

"Ramsay, gents' wear establishment, one forty."

"Yes."

"Hotel, one hundred."

"Why not stay at home?"

"Well, I had to stop at the hotel often."

"Well?"

"Broadbent, three hundred."

"What for?"

"Gambling debt."

"I see."

"Rufus Moore, six hundred."

"For same?"

"Yes."

"Next."

"Barney Vail, one thousand."

"Yes."

"Hal Burton—well, let me see—it is fifteen hundred clear, I remember now."

"What else?"

"That is all."

"Yes; fourteen thousand, three hundred and twenty-five dollars," said Anita, adding it up quickly.

"I see now what you wanted the fifteen thousand for."

"And you will pay all for me?"

"Yes, even to the debts due for gambling, and which I am sure you were cheated out of, for I have little confidence in those who are your sporting creditors."

"Now I will use a part of the money in the Safety Bank, and I will go to-night, for I have over an hour in which to catch the train, so kindly send a servant to order a hack, as I will not take the carriage out to-night, having told Spencer I would not need him."

Dean Dangerfield seized his hat and left the house, and his sister went to her room to prepare for her journey.

He went straight to a telegraph-office, and sent the following message:

"To HAL BURTON, ESQ.:—

"Sportsman's Inn, N—.

"I am detained here on important

"Gave your account as fifteen hundred, which she will pay."

"Come to the city and go West with me. You understand. Answer to my home." "D."

Having sent this message, Dean Dangerfield sprung into a hack that was passing and drove home.

He escorted his sister to the depôt, saw her on the train, and returned home, promising her to get his outfit for the western trip the next day.

Back to the library he went and began to pace the floor, muttering to himself as though in painful reverie.

"It is the best that I can do, for if Screws told what went on at the Dell, he may hint that he knows more, and Hal thought it best that we should go away."

"Now, Sis pays all I owe, and more, too, for Burton owes me; but he will bring me the money and we will start together."

"I only wish I had more, for I have no idea of joining the governor, not I, as I can expect nothing from him!"

"Egad, after all I have done, I can hardly expect it; but, I must make Sis give me a few thousands, and then Burton and myself will have to depend upon ourselves, if that goes."

"Hal ought to borrow a few hundreds to come here with. As he is over head and ears in debt now, a little more will not harm him—hal! Sis has left the keys to the desk."

He broke out in a cold sweat as his eyes fell upon the bunch of keys hanging in his father's desk.

He started toward it twice, halted, and then sat down to await until the servants had retired.

Soon he rose and went out to the rear hall.

"Bolton, I have work to do that will keep me up late, as I intend going West in a day or two, so close up the house and I will put out the library lights."

"Yes, sir," and Bolton was glad to get to bed.

When all was quiet, the young man locked the library door, let fall the heavy curtains, and sat down at the desk.

A guilty conscience made him suspicious, for, had the servants seen him looking over the desk, they would have thought nothing of it.

There was a roll of bills in a small drawer, and counting them he muttered:

"Four hundred dollars; they are safe."

Then he found some jewelry belonging to his father, a few gold pieces, and next the bank books.

In one he read of a deposit of bonds, amounting to fifty thousand dollars, with the words written:

"Not to be drawn against, and interest to be deposited to account."

The book of the Safety Bank his sister had taken with her; but, the others were there.

The Third City Bank book showed a balance on hand to date of twenty-two thousand.

"I'll just write a check for ten thousand of that amount, and that will last me and be a bonanza."

"Bah! why not make it twelve thousand, as I am about it?"

"I'll do it."

He took up several check books, found the one of the Third City Bank, and wrote at the head the place out West where his sister had told him that his father had been on a certain date.

Then he wrote in the amount, twelve thousand dollars, payable to himself, and, with another pen, forged his father's name, writing it with an ease that showed he had had some practice at doing so before.

He compared it with other autographs on old checks, and said:

"It is perfect."

Then he put the check in the bank-book and left it there while he started to his room.

But a violent ring at the door-bell startled him terribly.

He hastily arranged the curtains, left the keys where he had found them, and started for the door, rubbing his eyes as though he had been asleep, for he feared that his sister might have returned.

But it was only a messenger-boy, and the telegram was addressed to him. It read:

"Message caught me at home. Will collect to-morrow as stated, and meet you in city at the club to-morrow, midnight." H. B."

He was so pleased, he gave the boy a dollar and then went to bed.

He ate a hearty breakfast, for he seemed to have cast honor to the winds and decided fully upon his course for the future.

After banking hours began, he strolled into the Third City.

He was known to the cashier, and handed in his book with the check, saying pleasantly:

"Please let me have that, Sharpe?"

"Certainly, Mr. Dangerfield. How do you want it?"

"In fifties and hundreds, as I have to pay it out."

"I see you were a witness in an important murder case," remarked Mr. Sharpe, anxious to be agreeable to the son of his wealthy depositor.

"Yes, and I felt sorry for the poor fellow, as he saved my life once; but thank you, Mr. Sharpe, and good-morning."

"Good-morning, Mr. Dangerfield. Call in when you can."

Dean Dangerfield bowed, pocketed his twelve thousand dollars, and returning to his home, put the bank-book back in its place.

Then he sauntered out to buy what he wished for his Western trip, and, as Anita was to pay the bills, he launched into considerable extravagance.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANITA'S MISSION.

A LADY closely veiled landed from an early train at N—, and took a room in the City Hotel, where her trunk now followed her.

She sat down and wrote a number of notes, and dispatched them by messenger, after which she had breakfast.

Then she dressed herself in a black suit, and wearing a thick sable veil that completely concealed her face, she quietly left her room and departed from the hotel by the side entrance, as though not wishing to attract attention.

Her steps led her to an office, over the door of which hung a sign:

"DAVID VERDAN,
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW."

She asked the attendant if Mr. Verdan would see her, and was ushered into his private office.

Without raising her veil she said to the ex-judge:

"Judge Verdan, I wish you would give me the particulars of this murder case which has condemned young Dare Sloan to death, and permit me to say that knowing your time is valuable, you have but to name your price for services rendered."

"If you are the friend of Sloan I will gladly give you all the particulars without payment, madam."

"Pardon me, but you are not his mother, I feel sure, yet your veil completely—"

"I so intended to have my veil conceal me, Judge Verdan; but I will not hide from you, for you must aid me."

She removed her veil as she spoke, and the startled lawyer said:

"Miss Dangerfield?"

"Yes, and I only yesterday learned of all this trouble, and I come to you in confidence, sir."

"I wish you to tell me just what you can of this sad affair, and your own opinion regarding the innocence of Mr. Sloan, whom I am frank to confess I believe to be innocent."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for such is my own opinion, my dear young lady."

"I did all in my power to save Dare, but the evidence certainly points to his guilt, as you will yourself say when you have heard all, and I do not blame the jury for rendering the verdict they did."

Then Judge Verdan told Anita Dangerfield the whole story.

She listened with deep interest, asking a question here and there, that showed an intelligence of legal matters that surprised the judge, and then said:

"Can nothing more be done, sir?"

"Nothing."

"Could not the governor pardon him?"

"He could, but will he?"

"I can ask him."

"Then, if he can be prevailed upon, you are the one, Miss Dangerfield, to persuade him."

"Write me out the facts in the shortest way possible, and a letter that you believe him innocent, and get one from the chief of police, who also, you say, does not think him guilty."

"I return to the city to-night, but shall go at once to the governor and plead for Mr. Sloan's life, to commutation of sentence to imprisonment for life, if naught else, and then we can have time to work in which to prove his innocence."

"I will be at the City Hotel, sir, one hour before my train leaves," and Anita took her departure.

Returning to the hotel she changed her dress once more and then sat down to wait, as though expecting some one, for she had placed upon a table before her, pen, ink, paper and a check-book.

Soon a card was sent up, and Anita bade the door-boy show the gentleman up to her parlor.

Soon a gentleman entered, and appearing to know Anita, greeted her pleasantly, while she said:

"Pardon my asking you to come here, Mr. Vaughan, but my father has gone West indefinitely, whither my brother goes at once to join him, so I came to take up the note for ten thousand soon due, and which I asked you to bring with you."

"I have it here, Miss Dangerfield; but it is not due for a week yet."

"I prefer to take it up now, so how shall I make this check payable?"

"To Cashier, Miss Vaughan."

The check was written and signed, the note received in return, and Mr. Vaughan had been gone but a minute when the card of Hal Burton came up.

He sought to be friendly as he entered the little parlor, but Anita's haughty look checked him, and he said:

"Glad to see you back again in N—, Miss Dangerfield."

Without noticing his remark, Anita said:

"My brother wishes me to pay to you a sum of money you claim he owes you, sir, for a gambling debt. Write a receipt for the amount, please, and here is a check. For what sum shall I make it out?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars, Miss Dangerfield."

"That is the sum he named. Here is your check, and I need not remind you that our interview is at an end."

His face flushed with anger, but he bowed and left the room.

The bootmaker called next, and was promptly paid, then Mr. Broadbent and Rufus Moore, who were received with the same haughty reserve as Hal Burton.

The other creditors followed in order, according to their appointments through Anita's notes to them, and she then sent down for the landlord, paid the hundred due him, and, ordering a carriage, drove out to Daisy Dell Manor.

The servants there were taken by surprise, and Dean's traps were quickly packed up and sent to the depôt, while Anita gave notice that she would return in a few days, and to have the home in readiness for her, as she expected to remain some time.

Then she returned to town, met Judge Verdan at the appointed hour, and, an hour after, was on her way back to the city.

She arrived at ten, and found her brother awaiting her, for he had suspected she would return at once.

She told him what she had done, looked over the bills of his purchases, told him frankly that he had been too extravagant, but she would pay them, and added:

"Now, brother, your trunks from Daisy Dell Manor I brought with me, and you had better get ready to leave on the noon train to-morrow, for you must not delay."

"I will pay these bills to-morrow, and give you as much more as will just make up the fifteen thousand dollars, and you certainly will be well supplied, especially as you are going to join father."

"By the way, Sis, there is one bill in N— I forgot, so I wrote to have it sent, and you can open it and mail check when it arrives."

"It is only thirty dollars for a pair of pistols."

"I will pay it, but that leaves you thirty dollars less, for I will not go one dollar over the fifteen thousand."

"All right; I will run down to the Club to say good-by, and pack up when I come back, so I can leave to-morrow at noon," and Dean was as anxious to get away, as was his sister to have him, for she wished to go to the capital to see the governor about Dare Sloan's pardon, while her brother dreaded that check he had forged being discovered before he could leave.

At the Club he met Hal Burton, and that worthy was only too anxious to decamp west-

ward, for reasons best known to himself, and as he had borrowed several hundred dollars, and Dean shared with him the fifteen hundred, he considered himself fairly supplied with funds, while he had an idea that his friend had more money in reserve, which would appear when needed.

Still, Dean Dangerfield was too shrewd to show his hand then, as he knew that Hal Burton would at once suspect that he could not come by so large a sum save by dishonesty.

Having arranged with Hal Burton to purchase tickets and have all in readiness at the dépôt for the noon train, Dean Dangerfield returned home to find his sister worried about her keys.

"Oh, yes; I forgot to tell you I saw them in the desk, so took them out and put them in that vase yonder on the mantel, Sis."

"Well, all is arranged for my departure tomorrow, and I owe it to your kindness, my dear sister, that I am out of my scrapes, and have a new start in life."

"You are a noble little woman. Good-night," and kissing her he went to his room.

The next day he departed for the West, finding Hal Burton on the train to meet him, and saving the choice seats for himself and pal.

An hour after Anita Dangerfield also departed from the city; but her destination was the capital of the State, and she went to see the governor about a pardon, or commutation of sentence for Dare Sloan.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GOVERNOR'S DECISION.

THE governor was quite impressed with the beauty of a fair visitor who "requested to see him privately upon a mission of life and death."

He saw a young girl of exceeding loveliness of face and symmetry of form, and one upon whose face was set the stamp of refinement and noble womanhood.

"I have called, your Excellency, to ask of you a favor which it is in your power alone to grant, that of pardon to a fellow being sentenced to die on the gallows, or if not that, at least a commutation of the sentence to imprisonment for life."

"Here are the papers in the case, and I, and others, are willing to set our honor upon the innocence of the condemned man, against all the evidence that appears of his guilt."

"I leave his fate in your hands, sir, pleading for his life."

The voice of Anita Dangerfield was low, musical and full of fervent sympathy, and his Excellency felt the power of its tones.

He took the papers, and, as she walked to a window and overlooked a garden, he glanced carefully over them.

At length she turned and met his gaze, so she approached him.

"Be seated, please."

She sat down, and the governor said in a voice that was painfully distinct:

"I have read these papers, and Judge Verdan is a man I esteem most highly, while the chief of police of N—— is also a man whose word is of value."

"But I fear that there is sympathy in their hearts which causes them to make the request they do, for I cannot possibly see how the jury, with such evidence, could have done otherwise than convict."

"The fact of two respectable young men, hearing the shot and cry for help, and finding the accused searching the dead body, and that the slain man was met by the murderer, his steps dogged to the end, seems proof conclusive of guilt, to my mind."

"Then the fact that this young man had just lost all of his wealth, and had been made the squire's heir, while his pistol had one chamber empty, and the bullet taken from the body matched those remaining in the weapon, all are beyond doubt conclusive evidence of Dare Sloan's crime, and I should err in my duty did I pardon him."

"And yet you can commute his sentence?" said Anita, coldly, for the manner and words of the governor had nerved her to hear the worst.

"No, I shall not interfere, for consistently I cannot do so."

"Nothing can change your decision, your Excellency?"

"Only proof of the prisoner's innocence."

"I regret to have taken so much of your Excellency's valuable time, and bid you good-morn-

ing," and Anita was sweeping from the room, when the governor called out:

"One moment, please."

She turned quickly with a flush of hope in her heart.

"What is this young man to you, if I may ask?"

Her face crimsoned and she replied:

"One to whom I twice owe my life, sir."

"I am sorry, for I wish I could serve you; but alas! duty demands that I refuse."

She bowed and swept from the room.

Going to a telegraph-office she sent the following message:

"To JUDGE DAVID VERDAN:—

"G—— positively refuses. Something else must be done. Am coming to see you."

"A. D."

That night Anita took the train back to the city, and with tired body and sad heart reached her home and sought the rest she so much needed.

The next morning her maid handed her the letters which had arrived for her.

There was one from her loved friend, Kate Kennerley, of Erie, Pennsylvania, who had been her school chum for years, and had been with her in the carriage when Dare Sloan had saved their lives.

Kate had gone to Daisy Dell Manor with Anita, who was anxious to serve as a check upon her brother's wild life, of which rumors had reached his father.

During their stay Dean Dangerfield had proven himself a devoted brother, had fallen in love with Kate, who was beautiful, lovable and an heiress, and had been refused by her when he offered himself, for the girl had read him like a book.

The letter received from Kate Kennerley was about Dare Sloan, for she had just heard of his arrest and conviction.

"It ended with:

"Oh, Anita! Can we not do something to save that noble man, for I am as sure that he is innocent as that I live?"

"Write at once."

Anita's answer to this was a telegram saying:

"I go to the Dell Wednesday. Join me here at once and accompany me. Don't fail."

The message was sent to the office by a servant, and then Anita took up other letters and hastily glanced over them.

The last one she took up was a letter addressed to her brother.

It was post-marked at N——, and she said, indifferently:

"The bill he referred to, so I will get it off my mind by sending a check at once."

She broke the seal, but suddenly her face flushed, then paled; the letter dropped from her hands, and she sat like one who had received a terrible blow.

CHAPTER XV.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

As has been said, Kate Kennerley was an heiress and a beauty, and her home near Erie was certainly a most charming one.

Like Anita, she was an only child, the pet of a devoted father, while around her constantly were a score of admirers anxious to win the prize of her love and hand.

The news of the trial and sentence of Dare Sloan had come to Kate Kennerley like a shock.

He had saved her from death, she knew his history, and she was well aware how deeply interested in him was Anita Dangerfield.

So she had at once written to ask if they could do nothing for him, like Kate she not believing that he could be guilty.

Had it been that he had killed a man in an encounter it would have been different; but that he had waylaid, murdered and robbed an old man, she would not, could not believe.

When she received the telegram from Anita she knew at once that it was more urgent than the words indicated.

She "read between the lines," as it were, and determined to start by the first train for the city to join her friend.

Sooner than Anita could have believed possible, Kate Kennerley drove up to the door of the Dangerfields' elegant mansion.

She found Anita pale and anxious, and she looked as though some terrible trouble was upon her.

"My dear Anita, is it then so bad as that?" she said, with deepest sympathy, as the two were together.

"He is to be hanged."

"Yes, but your fear shows, my dear, how deeply it causes you to suffer."

"Ah, Kate, if you only knew all, you would not wonder at my suffering."

"I see that you think that I am deeply in love with Mr. Sloan, and that is why I suffer; but that is not wholly right."

"Twice he saved my life, he saved yours, and I saw him that fearful night of fire on the steamer, and know just how brave, how noble he is.

"You saw him, too, when he caught sight of our runaway team, and saw that he risked his life in forcing his horse over those two fearful leaps to get to the road and catch our frightened animals before we should be dashed to death at the broken-down bridge."

"That was not the act of a coward, a highwayman, and none but such would do what he has been tried and sentenced for."

"But that is not all, dear Kate, for I have made a fearful discovery."

"Do not ask me to tell you of it, for I cannot, cannot, unless it is absolutely necessary; but I will do so if we must save Dare Sloan by other means than I hope now to do, for save him I shall."

"He shall not die on the gallows," and the eyes and expression of Anita Dangerfield proved that she meant all that she said.

Kate Kennerley had known her intimately, and never before had she seen her so moved, so determined.

Her calm manner always, had shown that there was a volcano of passion and determination beneath to break forth if the cause was given.

"Well, Anita, we will save him, for when two women put their heads together why should they fail?"

"When do you go to Daisy Dell?"

"To-day, for I wish to arrive by night, and I have written to Lawyer Verdan to meet us. He is a true friend to Dare, and we will drive out to the Dell together and can talk it all over."

"How good it was for you to come, for I need your help so much."

"It was my duty. But, have you thought of any plan of action?"

"Yes; but I wish to do all we can in other ways before trying it. He shall not die, if I have to—no, no, I must say no more now," and with a shudder Anita walked over toward the window.

A moment after Kate said:

"Where is your brother, Anita, for he certainly should wish to help Mr. Sloan?"

Anita turned quickly and said in a tone that Kate could not understand:

"Dean Dangerfield has gone West to join my father, so we will have no one at Daisy Dell Manor to be in our way."

"Your father felt most kindly toward Mr. Sloan, I know."

"Yes, and would sacrifice much to be of service to him now; but, father could do nothing, and we alone must act, with the aid of Judge Verdan."

"Dean, you know, and his friend Burton, were the witnesses of the killing of Squire Benson, and their testimony placed him where he now is."

"From what I heard, appearances were certainly against Mr. Sloan, and yet I cannot believe him guilty of murder for the hope of gain."

"He is not guilty," was Anita's firm response, and then the two maidens set about preparing for their trip to Daisy Dell Manor.

It was night when they arrived at N——, as Kate had wished, for she cared not to be seen by any one, and Judge Verdan was there to meet them.

He failed to recognize them in their long, thick vails, but Anita went up to him and grasped his hand:

"It is kind of you, sir; let me introduce my friend, Miss Kennerley."

"I have my barouche here, ladies, and drive myself, so no one will know of your coming. You can send for your trunks to-morrow," said the judge.

"We have a small trunk with us, judge, with all we need."

A man carried it to the barouche, the girls entered, and soon, with the judge for a driver, were on their way to Daisy Dell.

Anita had written to the housekeeper of the coming, and to have supper, but to let

know that she was expected; so all was ready for them.

After a substantial supper, they adjourned to the library, and then Anita, who had seemed nervous all the while, said abruptly:

"Now, Judge Verdan, we must talk over this affair we have on hand, for, under all circumstances, I am determined that Dare Sloan shall not die like a dog, for a crime of which he is as innocent as am I myself!"

CHAPTER XVI

ANITA KEEPS A SECRET.

THE manner and words of Anita Dangerfield convinced the judge that she knew more than she had so far made known regarding the case of Dare Sloan.

So he said calmly and with no desire to let her think that he suspected her:

"You make a bold assertion, Miss Anita, when you say that Mr. Sloan is as innocent of the crime as you are yourself."

"I mean it, for I am convinced that he is not guilty."

"And so am I. He never committed a deed so cruel and criminal," added Kate Kennerley.

Judge Verdan was a thorough reader of human nature, and as cunning as a fox in his legal profession.

He was a man of whom, in a case of interest to him, the presiding judge, the jury and opposing lawyers all stood in awe of.

He saw that Anita Dangerfield was holding something back, and also that she had not let her friend into her confidence.

When both had asserted the same thing, as to Dare Sloan's innocence, it had been in a way that showed Anita held a reserve fire, while Kate had merely acted upon her surmise of innocence.

"Have you, young ladies, other news in the case that makes you more confident?" asked the judge, pretending to see no more in the remark of one than in what the other had said.

Kate glanced at Anita and said:

"A brave man, sir, could not be the cowardly assassin and robber circumstances point to Mr. Sloan as having been."

"Well said, Miss Kennerley, and that is an argument I used in the trial, and firmly believe in myself."

"But the judge who presided and the jury took the apparent evidence of guilt and so decided, and Mr. Sloan has but two weeks longer to live."

"You saw the governor, Miss Anita, as your dispatch told me?"

"Yes, sir; and the evidence prejudiced him against Mr. Sloan."

"And he would not commute the sentence?"

"No, sir."

"Well, Miss Anita, let us go to work with our eyes open; so tell me just what you know to assert so positively that Sloan is innocent?"

Anita started at this and asked, quickly:

"How do you know that I have evidence?"

"I have been watching you closely; I read your letter between the lines, and your words now convince me that you know more than you have thus far admitted."

"I confess it; yet I say this in confidence. I cannot give you one atom of the knowledge I possess. I cannot betray confidence yet; but, surely will, if all else fails."

"You must be satisfied with this, and we must do all in our power to save Dare Sloan from the gallows."

"I agree with you; but all appeals will be in vain."

"Granted that they have been."

"What then?"

"We must try other plans."

"I can see nothing that can be done."

"We must help him make his escape."

The judge fairly started at these bold words flung at him with intense earnestness.

"But, Miss Anita—"

"Judge Verdan, you are our friend in this matter and I trust you fully."

"I know just how you are interested, so I do not ask you to betray your trust as an attorney, by breaking the law; but I do ask you to give me all the information you can to help me, for break it I shall, as, on my honor, I say to you that you will not regret it, that you will rejoice in your having helped me, as Dare Sloan is not the murderer of Squire Benson."

"Ah, Miss Anita, you are a brave girl to assert this and yet keep your secret to yourself."

"I shall do so, Judge Verdan, to the last, and then only, if all other plans fail to free Mr. Sloan, will I tell all that I know of this matter."

"Well, I will not urge it; but tell me your

plans, for I feel assured that you have found some way out of this."

"My plan is to help Mr. Sloan to escape, and I wish to ask you to get me permission to go to see him to-morrow."

"Will it be wise?"

"It will not be known who I am."

"If I asked the chief, I would have to say who you were. My idea is that you had best go, heavily veiled and ask the chief to let you see the prisoner."

"Tell him that you come in place of his mother, who cannot come, and this will hardly be a story, for you do come as one to cheer him. He will let you pass in, I am sure."

"Well, now tell me, please, what guards are at the jail?"

"There is, as you know, a gate guard, for the jail stands in the center of a block, surrounded by a high stone wall with iron spikes on the top."

"There are two gates, one for vehicles, and which is only opened for such, and a smaller iron door in the wall for persons to pass through."

"Here always stands, by day and night, a guard."

"And within?"

"By day there is a guard at the jail door, and at night the door is closed and a watchman walks the corridors all night."

"What floor is Mr. Sloan on?"

"On the second floor, in the rear of the jail at the end of the corridor, for he is now in the Death Cell."

"A door and window to it, of course?"

"Yes, there is an iron frame-work across the end of the corridor, and the gate in it is kept locked."

"Then there is the door into the cell, and opposite to it, in the rear, the window; but the latter is heavily grated with iron."

"And this guard in the corridors by night and the one at the gate are the only ones on duty?"

"After nine o'clock, yes, except a savage dog which is then turned loose and has the run of the jail-yard."

"Four barriers to overcome then?"

"What four, Miss Anita, have you reference to?"

"The iron grating of the window, the watchman in the corridor, the dog and the guard at the gate."

"Insurmountable obstacles, I fear," said the judge sadly.

"Oh, no; not as I regard them; but do you know this gate guard?"

"I do."

"Is it the same man every night?"

"Yes."

"Married?"

"No."

"A young man?"

"Possibly thirty."

"Trustworthy?"

"I should think so, or he would hardly have the position he has."

"What is his pay?"

"Eighty dollars a month, I believe, Miss Anita."

"What is his name, sir?"

"Richard Doyle."

"Can you tell me where he lives?"

"Number Fifteen, Elm street, in the outskirts of the city."

"Thank you, judge. I have material to work on, and it will not compromise you, which I am anxious not to do."

"Let me add, Miss Anita, that Doyle is most kindly toward Sloan, for when the freshet occurred in the river here three years ago, Doyle's house was washed adrift and was going to pieces on a sand-bar, when Dare Sloan swam out to him and brought him ashore at a terrible risk, for the guard could not swim a stroke."

"He reminded me of this the other day; but if he were to do aught to aid Sloan's escape, it would not only cost him his place but get him sent to prison for a certain term."

"I can understand all that, Judge Verdan, and I intend to work with my eyes open."

As it was now late, they retired, the judge accepting the hospitalities of Daisy Dell Manor for the night, intending to drive back to town early the next morning.

"Kate, I shall save him," said Anita, as the two retired to their rooms for the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VAILED VISITOR.

WHEN Judge Verdan arrived in town the next morning, he sent a hackman out the Daisy Dell road, telling him that he would meet

two ladies who were on foot, and could get a fare back.

The hackman drove rapidly along, and within a short distance of Daisy Dell Manor, found two ladies closely veiled.

They got in and were driven back to the town, to the City Hotel.

They were Anita and Kate, as the reader has surmised, for wishing to remain unknown in the matter, they cared not be driven to town in the family carriage.

After obtaining a room at the hotel, Anita sat down and wrote a note.

It was as follows:

"Will Mr. Richard Doyle be good enough to call at six sharp at the City Hotel, Room 10?

"He need ask for no one, but simply come to the room, which is the first door after passing through the ladies' entrance to the hotel.

"He will hear of something to his advantage by coming.

"Should he have to ask for any one, let it be for Miss Kennerley."

This note was dispatched by special messenger to Number Fifteen Elm street, Kate Kennerley giving it to the boy, as Anita was pretty well known in N—.

In an hour's time the boy returned and said that Mr. Doyle, being a night watchman at the jail, had retired for his day's sleep, but would call at the hour named.

"Now, I shall go to the jail, Kate, as soon as you return with your purchases," said Anita.

Kate at once went out on a shopping tour, and when she returned she had made some remarkable purchases.

There were several files, a coil of rope, a false beard and wig, with slouch hat.

"I did not buy but one thing at each store, Anita, and you can carry them under your cloak without suspicion, I think," she said.

Anita at once proceeded to put them in the lining of her cloak, which she ripped open for the purpose.

Then she went out alone and her steps led her to the jail, which she twice passed, so as to reconnoiter fully.

At the gate she rung the bell and asked to see the chief of police.

She was shown into the office, and the gentlemanly chief approached her politely with the remark:

"How can I serve you, lady?"

In choking accents came the words:

"I have come at last to see my poor Dare."

It was a clever ruse, and the chief was as cleverly taken in.

"I am glad that you are here, madam, for your son's sake, though you have my deepest sympathy."

"Barker, say to Mr. Sloan that his mother has arrived."

The man disappeared, and Anita, in her dress of black, leant on the window, the very picture of despair.

Soon the man returned, and the chief led her to the death cell, and said as he threw open the door of the cell:

"Your mother, Mr. Sloan, and you shall not be disturbed for an hour."

He closed the door quickly and retired, as though not wishing to witness the painful meeting, and Dare, with manacles on his ankles, stood and held out his arms.

But he started as the veil was drawn aside and the light from the window fell full upon the pale, beautiful face of Anita Dangerfield, whose finger was warningly pressed upon her lips.

"Great Heaven! Miss Dangerfield, can it be that you have done this?"

"Sh! This is no time for surprise or sentiment, for I am here to serve you, Mr. Sloan, and I let them believe the cheat that I was your mother, so do not you betray me, I implore!"

The words were uttered in almost a whisper, and she stood by the window as she spoke, resolute and brave.

"But, Miss—"

"Sh! you are not to talk, for I claim my woman's prerogative to do this. Come here by this window and stand with your arm about me, your back to the door, for jails are full of ears."

"Never mind the whys or wherefores of my coming. I am here, and I wish to tell you that I know you are guiltless of the crime charged upon you!"

"That must suffice; and more—it must excuse all that I am now doing."

"I tried to get the governor to pardon you, but he refused, and he would not commute your sentence, so that we could have time to prove your innocence—"

"We?"

"Yes, Kate Kennerley and I."

"God bless you!"

"As you could not be saved one way I tried this, and have brought you material for your use. Judge Verdan is watching the incoming trains, that your mother does not arrive and betray the plot. He will call on you to-night, but, say nothing to him about my being here, for he must not be compromised."

"If all goes well he will only say that he will not be able to see you again; but, if he does not say this, do not act."

"Should he send you word that he will not be able to call for some days, then act; I mean should he not call himself but send that word."

"Now, here is a bunch of keys I bought in the city."

"They are regular burglar-keys, I am told, and I will fit one to your manacles if you will sit down and place your ankle so I can reach it."

"Thank you—ah! the first one fits; so hide it," and she took it from the bunch and handed it to him.

"Now, here are some files, and that iron grating is not over an inch thick, so cut two of the bars."

"This rope will let you down to the yard, and the dog will be looked to."

"Here are a false beard, wig and slouch hat, and at twelve you leave your cell by the window, go around the jail to the gate and a man will meet you there, so follow his directions implicitly."

"Once you are away, your innocence can be proven, some day."

"If the judge should not come and bid you good-bye, or send, do not make the attempt to-night, and I will call to-morrow."

"This is all I have to say, Mr. Sloan, only I advise you to go to the far West and remain in hiding, for you will be looked for, and if taken, you know the penalty, for, though I know you are innocent, others believe you guilty, and the Court has sentenced you."

In vain did Dare Sloan try to speak; his throat was too dry; he seemed choking, and his tongue could not utter a word.

He had not flinched before even under his sentence, but he trembled now, and his face was haggard with suffering.

Now that Anita had said all she had to say, she was embarrassed, and she felt that he suffered.

She could only remain silent, while he, to hide his emotion, concealed the rope, files and other things about his bed.

Then he arose and leant on the window-sill, where she stood gazing out into the yard.

Thus passed the minutes until the sound of approaching steps were heard.

With an effort Dare Sloan then said:

"God bless you! We will meet again."

She made no reply, but drawing her veil over her face, started toward the door as it swung open, while the prisoner said earnestly:

"Come to-morrow!"

She made no reply, but passed out into the corridor, the door clanged behind her, the iron gate went to with a dismal ring and she returned to the office under the care of Barker.

Then she sunk into a seat for a moment, as though overcome; but she rallied quickly, and, as the chief was away, Barker escorted her to the gate, and, fifteen minutes after, she threw herself into Kate Kennerley's arms murmuring:

"It is done!"

Then she swooned away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KEEPER'S BARGAIN.

RICHARD DOYLE was an honest-faced man, good-looking, and a clever fellow taken altogether.

He had strength and good health as an inheritance, when his parents died, but certain ambitions he had nurtured of being a rich man, some day, vanished when he found he had to settle down to hard work.

He had tried farming, stage-driving, and was looking for a school when, one night, he strolled into N— with but a few dollars in his pocket.

Two footpads, thinking that he was well-supplied with funds, sprung upon him unawares, but, they made a mistake, for, though wounded, he fought them off and captured both just as the chief of police of N— dashed up.

Doyle told his story, said that he thought one of the men was dead, which proved to be the case. The other was not much hurt, and was at once sent in a hack to the hospital.

The next day it was discovered that the two men were desperate characters, escaped convicts and in for life, and a reward was already out for their capture, of five thousand dollars.

Doyle became a hero, got the reward and was made night watchman at the jail, with a salary of eighty dollars a month.

He had no references, said nothing as to his antecedents, so was taken on faith of what he had done.

For three years he had served faithfully and saved up half of his salary, so that he now had some six thousand dollars in cash, including his reward money.

This was the person who called at the City Hotel at six o'clock P. M. on the day of Anita's visit to the jail, and knocked at the door of Room Number Ten.

He was invited into the little parlor by Anita, Kate being in the adjoining room.

"Mr. Doyle, I believe?"

"Yes, ma'am—I mean miss," answered Doyle, wholly taken aback at the beautiful girl who confronted him.

Anita turned the key in the door, and said, pleasantly:

"Be seated, Mr. Doyle, for I wish to have a serious talk with you."

Richard sat down, but was bewildered. He had been intending to purchase some property, had written about it to the owner, who lived in the metropolis, and had received answer that she would soon be in N— and would see him.

So he had called at the hotel, but the beauty of Anita completely upset him.

"Mr. Doyle," said Anita, taking a seat right in front of him, "I sent for you because I am in trouble and you can help me out of it."

"I?" and Doyle was more than ever non-plussed.

"Yes, and I will tell you now. You are the night watchman at the jail, I believe?"

"The gate-keeper, miss."

"Yes, and I wish to ask you, if there was a prisoner in there, under sentence of death, one who had saved your life, for instance, and you knew he was not guilty of the crime for which he had been condemned to suffer, would you not wish to save him?"

"I would, miss, but my duty would keep me from doing so."

"Exactly, as you regard it. Now, Mr. Doyle, I have in this package five thousand dollars, and I wish to offer it to you."

"To me?" gasped Doyle.

"Yes, I wish to offer it to you for a purpose, and that is to befriend one who saved your life."

"Dare Sloan?"

"You are right. He saved my life on two occasions, and has helped others. He risked his life to save yours, at the time of the freshet in the river, and—"

"God knows he did, miss, and it hurts me to the heart to see him die."

"Yes, but he must not die, for we can save him!"

Richard Doyle shook his head.

"I say we can save him, and we will! If he was guilty, I would let him die; but no brave man ever did the act he is accused of. He was tried and purely circumstantial evidence condemned him."

"I admit that his meeting the squire on the train, following him, and being by his dead body when found, with his pistol and one shot missing, and the bullet taken from the body of the dead man matching those in his revolver, not to speak of Squire Benson's will in his favor, with his having been left penniless, all these point to his being the murderer."

"They do, miss, but, somehow, I cannot believe it of him."

"I know he is not guilty, Richard Doyle," declared Anita, impressively.

"You know it, miss?"

"On my honor, yes; and yet I cannot—dare not betray what I know! But I swear to you, Richard Doyle, against all appearances to condemn him, Dare Sloan is not guilty."

"You should make this known."

"I cannot—no, I cannot, for others would suffer. Yes, it would cause untold suffering. But, once free, Dare can prove his innocence, perhaps, and I wish you to help me—help me upon my word that he is guiltless. You can go from here with him, fly to a safe retreat in the West, for you have not a tie to bind you here, as I know."

"My duty, miss!"

"Your duty is to the man to whom you owe your life, even were he guilty; but when I swear

to you that he is not guilty, that you will help to hang the man you owe what you are now, you should not let him be strangled upon the gallows."

"Do you hear, strangled on the gallows like a dog, when you, doing harm to no one, only remiss in your duty, can save him."

"What would your conscience suffer should you afterward find him innocent?"

"Ay, what will you suffer to see him hanged, believing him guilty and feeling that you owe him your life, and could save him and yet did not."

"Yes, did not from a sense of duty that cost a life, that put upon you the blood of an innocent man."

"I say, Richard Doyle, do you weigh duty against life?"

The eyes of Anita Dangerfield fairly blazed, and her face was flushed and eager.

She had risen to her feet and now faced the man, who seemed to be under her spell, for he cried out in a voice that quivered:

"For God's sake, tell me how I can save him?"

Instantly Anita dropped into her chair again and said with forced calmness:

"I will tell you."

CHAPTER XIX.

ANITA'S BOLD SCHEME.

"RICHARD DOYLE, I felt that you would not refuse between duty to one under the shadow of the gallows, who was innocent, and duty toward your employer, the city."

"I have here the money I promised, and—"

"Hold on, miss, and understand me right here. I could not be bribed to do this by ten times the sum you offer; but, I do it from a sense of greater duty to Dare Dean than to the city that employs me."

"If I accepted a bribe, I would be criminal, in my own conscience, and so would hate myself!"

"No! Keep your money and— One minute!"

"I have my money in the city in bank, just five thousand, and I have at my home one thousand in cash. I'll give you my book and a check, so you can draw it, and I'll take this, for some folks know where I have my deposit, and they will telegraph there at once, expecting me to call for it."

"Very well; I will collect it, for I take the train to-night and will be at the bank when it opens. But I wish you would accept your expenses from me."

"No, miss; I have enough, and to spare, and can make a good start somewhere with what I have. Now, what is your plan?"

"I have already taken to Mr. Sloan some files, a rope, false beard, wig and hat."

"But his irons?"

"I found a key that would unlock them, so left it with him."

"I heard his mother had been to see him."

"No, they thought that I was his mother, for I wished them to think so."

"You are a schemer, miss."

"All women are, when put to it; but there is a savage dog in the jail-yard."

"Yes, miss—Catchem."

"He knows you?"

"Oh yes; I turn him loose every night."

"Well, to-night forget to do that duty, and wait at your post after midnight, until Mr. Sloan comes."

"Yes, miss."

"You can then both come here, for I notice that the ladies' door is not closed until after the one-o'clock train arrives."

"Come right in, for the door will be open, and you will find disguises in that closet, which you had better put on, and catch the one-o'clock train, and I advise you to make for the West with all speed, and Mr. Sloan can suggest where to go, as he knows the country well, I believe."

"And my check-book, miss, for you?"

"Leave it at the office of Judge Verdan, and say it will be called for."

"Yes, miss, I will go home at once and get it and arrange to leave, for I go on my post at nine o'clock."

"And I wish you would give this to Mr. Sloan."

"It is money, twenty-five hundred dollars, and this note explains," and she handed him a note which read:

"Use the money as your own, repaying it when you can do so to the one who ever wishes you well."

"Now, Mr. Doyle," continued Anita, "I would advise that you write a note to the chief of police,

telling him that you have aided Mr. Sloan to escape, as you are convinced of his innocence, and that you hope the wisdom of your course will some day be proven, and if you have betrayed your trust it was to save the life of one who had risked his life to save yours."

"I'll do it, miss, I'll write the note when I go home and put it in the letter-box at the gate to-night when I leave."

"Now, Mr. Doyle, I am going to tell you who I am, and should the world go hard with you, should you ever need a friend, write to me and you will find that I have not forgotten your kindness to me and to Mr. Sloan."

"I am Anita Dangerfield, of Daisy Dell Manor."

"By Jove, I half-guessed it, from your beauty and all folks said of you, and knowing that Mr. Sloan had saved your life! I am glad to serve you, Miss Dangerfield."

Richard held out his hand and it was warmly grasped by Anita.

Then he arose, pocketed the money packages, for himself and for Dare Sloan, and soon after took his departure.

As he did so, Kate Kennerley came in from the next room, and the two friends congratulated each other on their success thus far.

"Anita, you are a wonderful girl, for you fairly magnetized that man."

Then Kate sallied out once more to look up disguises, and in an hour she returned accompanied by a boy carrying a number of bundles.

These she deposited upon the bed, and the two looked over the purchases and found them all that could be wished, for Richard Doyle being small of stature, there was a feminine outfit for him, while that of Dare Sloan was the suit of an old farmer, cap, gray wig and all.

These were put in the closet, just as a tap came at the door, and Judge Verdan entered.

"Here, my beautiful schemer, is a package left at my office for you," he said, handing it to Anita.

"Yes, it is Mr. Doyle's bank-book, and a check for bearer," and she explained all to the judge.

"That is an honest fellow, certainly, to accept no money consideration; but what about your visit to the jail?"

Anita told him all and he smiled as he said:

"If the chief could only have seen under that vail."

"Well, he's a good fellow and perhaps you could have won him over too, and he will rejoice at Sloan's escape, while the letter of Doyle will keep him out of trouble, although the night men are responsible for the prisoners."

"Now what can I do?"

"Simply go by the jail and leave word that you are called away and to tell the prisoner good-by for you; but see that the message goes to him, for his escape depends upon it."

"I can call, and—"

"No, I have thought of that, but did not wish to mix you up in it, so arranged for your sending him good-by."

"You are a most thoughtful young lady, I assure you."

"I will go at once and send the message, so tell me what else I can do?"

"Kindly drive out to the Dell and bring my maid in to take the train with us to-night, for if we go it may be known."

"I will gladly do it, and am only sorry I have not been able to help you more, young ladies."

"I will take the train north myself to-night, as I have business in S—, and in a couple of days will see you in the city and we can talk over the success of your plot, which I must say is equal to any detective work I ever heard of."

"Now, until we meet in the city, *au revoir!*"

The judge took his departure and left the two girls to their own meditations.

They had a late dinner in their rooms, sent for and paid the bill up to the following morning, but had their trunk when it arrived, with Anita's maid, taken over to the dépôt.

The maid went over and bought the tickets and checked the trunk, and told them she had seen the judge there who told her to say that his message had been delivered.

Then they waited until time to go over to the train, and slipped out of the hotel, leaving the door unlocked and gas burning.

Soon after they were being whirled rapidly toward the city on the Express train, wondering and hoping.

CHAPTER XX.

STRIVING FOR FREEDOM.

AFTER the visit of Anita Dangerfield to his cell, for a long while Dare Sloan sat in silence,

and his face, as the light fell upon it, showed that he was deeply moved.

Not a quiver of fear had he shown through his whole trial, and as his time of execution drew near his guards were loud in their praise of his nerve and courtly manners, which never forsook him.

But now the visit of this beautiful girl, who had given him hope of life, almost unnerved him, and it was a long while before he could command himself once more.

He had wondered about his mother, and in his own trouble and sorrow it had pained him to know nothing of her.

Why had she left their home, as she had, and why had no answer come to his telegrams and letters to her?

Had harm befallen her also?

He almost feared that it was so.

Now there was a chance of his gaining his freedom, and his first thought was of his mother, and how he could find her.

It was a desperate chance, he knew; but he must meet the chances as they ever so desperate.

To remain there was to die on the gallows.

By escape he could do much.

And how had Anita accomplished all this?

Who had aided her? She had spoken of Kate Kennerley, but could it be possible that two girls could so cleverly get the best of jail officials and iron bars?

And what had been Anita's motive?

Was it only to repay a life for a life?

He had been glad of a chance to get back to N— that he might see her; but he had not expected to meet her as he had.

So he tried the key again in his manacles, and it worked to a charm.

He measured the height of his window to the ground, and knotted his rope so as to give him an easy descent.

Then he stepped up to the window, and with a file in his hand, tried the lowest iron bar across.

The file made a grating sound that seemed very loud to his acute ears, so he took some oil from his lamp and put on the bar, and tried again.

"I can do it," he said, after a short trial, and he went and glanced out of the grating in his door up the corridor, for his chains allowed him the length of his room.

He saw no one about, and knew that the guard was seldom on the upper tier of the jail in the daytime from after breakfast to supper, except to bring his dinner.

So he began work again, blowing the iron dust out of the window as it accumulated.

For two hours he worked steadily and the bar was filed through close to the window.

Some books piled upon the window concealed the cut, and he lay down upon his cot, knowing that the guard would soon bring his dinner.

He soon came, and a tempting repast he brought him.

"I feel awful sorry for you, Mr. Sloan, for somehow I can't reason myself into believing you kill the squire," said the guard.

"You are all very kind to me, Barker, and I appreciate it."

"And I felt that sorry for your poor mother this morning, until I cried almost, for the tears would come into my eyes, for she trembled like a willow tree and well-nigh fainted in the office on her way out."

Dare Sloan made no reply, but his food nearly choked him.

"Well, sir, I do hope something may turn up to save you, for it's two weeks to-day to the time of your hanging."

"Thank you, Barker, I also hope that something may save me from the gallows, for I am not the one who murdered the squire, in spite of all evidence that points to my being."

"You are all kind to me, and the one who thinks that kind hearts can not be found in those whom duty calls to guard men behind iron bars, do not know the men who are jailers."

"This was a fine dinner, Barker, and I thank you."

Barker took up the tray and departed, when the prisoner immediately began work on the upright bar.

With these two filed through and pressed outward or inward, the space would allow of his passing between the others.

So he held on at his work until the shadows of night came; then the work was done!

His books hid the two severed iron bars, and once more he threw himself upon his cot to rest.

Barker brought him his supper, and mechan-

ally cast his eyes about the cell to see that all was right—not that he had any suspicion, for it never entered his brain the thought that a man, heavily manacled on one leg, with iron grating in a window twenty-five feet from the ground, with a savage dog in the yard, a watchman at the gate, and a high wall, not to speak of the guard in the jail at night, could escape.

It was simply impossible he thought, and from habit only he looked about him.

Then he bade the prisoner good-night, told him he must put out his lamp when the clock struck nine, and departed.

Dare Sloan sat down to his table when the guard had gone, and wrote as follows to the chief of police:

"MY DEAR SIR:—

"Were I a guilty man, I would never have faced my fate as I have done; but, knowing my innocence, and not wishing to hang for another's crime, I take advantage of an opportunity offered to make my escape to-night.

"I desire to thank you for much kindness shown me, and, through you, others who have been my keepers.

"By my escape to-night I hope to be able to prove that it is not well to convict a man upon circumstantial evidence alone.

"When there is a doubt, give him the benefit of it, for it certainly must be a severe load to carry on the conscience of a judge, jury and prosecuting attorney to know afterward that they have committed a legal murder, hanged an innocent man, which would be their case with me, did I await here the day set for me to die on the gallows.

"Wishing you well, sir,

"I am

"Faithfully yours,

"DARE SLOAN."

This letter was addressed to the chief and laid aside to be placed on the table when he left his cell.

Then the prisoner waited for the coming of the night-watch at nine, for he had received the word sent by Judge Verdan that he was going out of town for a few days and left good-by, and Dare Sloan felt perfect faith in Anita, that she had arranged her plot beyond fear of failure.

The night-guard, a man who had never treated the prisoner with ordinary kindness, soon appeared, threw open his door, and said, gruffly:

"All right in here, prisoner?"

"It is your place to find that out," was the stern reply, and Dare, who had retired to his cot, turned his face to the wall.

The guard gave a rude laugh, flashed his lantern into the room and disappeared, locking the door after him, and also the iron gate across the corridor.

Dare knew that he usually came the rounds about four times during the night, but did not open the cell doors; so he waited until his second round, which was about eleven o'clock.

Then he arose, dressed himself quickly and bent the iron bars outward.

It was no easy task, but he accomplished it, and then putting on the wig, beard and slouch hat, he made the knotted rope fast to the upper bars, and forced his way out of the window.

He lowered himself readily to the ground, crept to the shadow of the wall and went around it to the gate.

There stood the guard and this was his moment of peril.

What if a mistake had been made?

He was ready to meet the worst, and spring upon the guard if necessary, and so rose and walked toward him.

The guard never moved, never spoke, and he walked up to him and asked:

"Are you waiting for any one?"

"Yes, for you, Mr. Sloan. I am Richard Doyle, whose life you saved. Come!"

He unlocked the gate as he spoke. Then stepped out and the guard relocked it and dropped the key into the letter-box, with his letter to the chief.

"Now we must be off, for we have to catch the train," he said quickly, and they hastened away toward the hotel, entered Room 10 unseen, and, coming out, were so disguised as to be unrecognizable.

Ten minutes after the train came in and, boarding it, N— was quickly left behind them.

CHAPTER XXI.

SAFE!

IT was the day after her return to her city home, that Anita Dangerfield arose early and glanced at the papers.

She had gone to the bank the day before, with her veil down, presented the book and check of Richard Doyle and had gotten the money.

Then she returned to her home and she and Kate took a day of rest, which they certainly needed.

Hardly had she glanced at the paper when she ran to Kate's room.

"It is here and all is well.

"Listen!"

Then she read aloud as follows:

"THE GALLOWS CHEATED!

"A CLEVER ESCAPE!

"Guilty, or Not Guilty?

"News has come to us from the thriving town of N— of a bold escape from prison in that place of a man condemned to death.

"Our readers will remember the trial noticed in our columns some time since of Dare Sloan, for taking the life, it was alleged, of a rich old farmer by the name of Squire Benson.

"The trial was of great interest on account of the parties concerned therein, and the testimony was such as to condemn by circumstantial evidence.

"The following is a description of the case, taken from our report of the trial."

Then followed a lengthy account of the trial, the history of Dare Sloan, and in which Darke Dangerfield was spoken of as having killed the father of the accused, in a personal encounter, nearly a score of years before.

The article then went on to say:

"In two weeks the prisoner was to have been hanged; but it seems that he had rescued from drowning, at the risk of his own life, the night-watch at the jail, one Richard Doyle, who with others, felt convinced that Sloan was not guilty, and so determined to save him from death.

"To do this he concocted a clever plan, it is said by the aid of two mysterious ladies who visited N—, but that is only surmise, founded on the fact that a lady drew Doyle's money from the bank here, as was ascertained to-day; but it is not seen how the two ladies could have been of any service in the bold escape.

"Furthermore Doyle, the night-watch, left a note for the chief of police, saying why he rescued the prisoner, and that he hoped that it would be proven he was right in doing so.

"He got to the prisoner in some way files and a rope, and gave him a key to unlock the manacles upon his ankles.

"The condemned man filed his way through the bars of the window, lowered himself by means of the rope and joined Doyle at the gate, when they escaped together, going where the detectives thus far have been wholly unable to discover.

"The following letters are the ones left by Doyle and the prisoner for the chief of police."

Then follow the letters, and the article continued:

"Now, the question is—is Dare Sloan guilty or not guilty?

"It certainly will be a severe set-back against circumstantial evidence, if, now that he is free, he is able to disprove the charge against him, and, for the sake of the young man, who certainly did not appear to be an assassin and robber, we trust that he can do so.

"His lawyer, Judge David Verdan, was seen at S— yesterday by a reporter, and questioned upon the subject. He said that he considered the escape a clever one, and, as the night watch of the jail was gone with the prisoner, there was no one else to hold responsible.

"As to the guilt or innocence of his late client the judge said that he was assured of the charge against him being false.

"Detectives have been started in all directions to overtake the fugitives, and a reward of five thousand dollars has been offered for their capture.

"We have just learned of another sensation at N—, for a young man there of good family, but who led a fast and reckless life—and who, by the way, was a witness against Sloan—disappeared some days ago, saying that he was going to the city on business.

"It has now leaked out that he forged his aunt's name to a check for five hundred dollars and got the money on it, so it is not likely that he will return to N—, as the old lady says she would send him to prison were he her own son."

Such was the article in the paper, and the two

girls seemed delighted to feel that Dare Sloan and Richard Doyle had escaped, though they dreaded that they might be recaptured.

"Kate, I always knew that Hal Burton was a rascal, and I verily believe that he went West with my brother.

"I will be very glad when father comes, for I shall confess to him just what I have done."

"It will be best, Anita, and he will uphold you in it, I know; but, how strange that no word has come from Dare Sloan's mother in all this time!"

"It is strange, Kate; but then, she is a very mysterious woman, and even when her son's life was at stake, may have preferred to keep in the background. But, come; let us go down to breakfast.

They had hardly finished breakfast when a card was brought in.

"Ah! it is Judge Verdan!" cried Anita, and they hastened into the parlor, where the judge was enjoying a look at the luxurious surroundings in which he found himself.

He greeted the girls pleasantly and remarked:

"You have a grand home here, Miss Anita."

"Yes, sir, it is certainly a charming dwelling-place, for my father loves luxury."

"He is right to enjoy it with his wealth; but, have you seen the morning papers?"

"Yes, sir, and it made us feel very glad to learn that he escaped."

"You have the praise of it, Miss Anita, and it was well-planned and executed."

"You do not think they will be captured?"

"Not they! Dare is as sharp as a needle, and Doyle is no fool. They are safe beyond pursuit, you may rely on that; but, you saw that your brother's intimate friend, Hal Burton, had gone wrong?"

"Yes, sir," and Anita's face flushed.

"I predicted it of him some day, and I was sorry to see your brother so intimate with him. But, any news of your father?"

"No, judge, except that he will be away for weeks yet; but, as Kate is to be my guest until his return, I will not be lonesome, and next week we are to go down to Daisy Dell Manor for a while."

"Yes, it is lovely there now," declared the judge, and as he wished to catch the noon train back home he soon after took his leave, muttering to himself:

"What that lovely girl knows about this murderer, the secret she holds, troubles her, for I can see it."

CHAPTER XXII.

KEEPING A SECRET.

Two weeks passed at Daisy Dell Manor and the two girls had heard nothing to cause them dread for the safety of Dare Sloan and Richard Doyle.

All the detectives had returned from the pursuit utterly baffled, and it was given up that the fugitives had gotten away beyond all chance of capture.

A letter forwarded from the city, told Anita that her father was coming home soon, so she and Kate determined to at once leave Daisy Dell Manor to be there to welcome him on his arrival.

They had enjoyed in a quiet way their stay at the manor, had sketched, rode horseback, driven about the country and into town, and also roamed about the forests.

Elmwood Hall, the old home of the Sloans, was still unoccupied, and they had looked over it, the person in charge showing them through.

They had visited the old cemetery, and seen the grand monument erected to Henry Sloan, who had fallen by the hand of Mr. Dangerfield in the long ago, and they had often sat on the little bridge where the encounter had occurred, and talked over the sad incident together.

Judge Verdan had driven out to the manor often and dined with the young ladies, and he had kept them well posted about affairs of interest to them.

"There's not a man about the jail, from the sheriff down, who is not glad that Sloan escaped," he said, and then added:

"But you had a close shave of it about Doyle's check, for a detective was telegraphed to go and watch the bank, thinking that the man would go there to draw his money. The officer asked about it during the day, and the cashier told him that a lady had drawn it out just after the bank had opened that morning."

But Anita and Kate left the Dell and its quiet pleasures and returned to the city.

The day of their arrival a letter came from

Darke Dangerfield telling his daughter to expect him in a few days.

Another letter arrived by the same mail, and was postmarked at Omaha, Nebraska.

That letter Anita read aloud to Kate, as follows:

"Words can never express to you, my dear Miss Dangerfield, what gratitude I hold in my heart for you. You saved me from a cruel, ignominious death upon the gallows, and your own heart must tell you how deeply I feel the debt due you, a debt that thanks can never pay.

"You said that you knew me to be innocent of the crime with which I was charged, so it is needless for me to reassert that I am not the guilty one a 'jury of my peers' made me.

"What knowledge you possess, or how you gained it, I have no means of knowing; but your reward for your noble deed is your own consciousness of having done a righteous act.

"As I am not guilty I feel, though now a hunted man, that I can look my fellow-men in the eyes fearlessly; but I shall, for your sake, remain in a safe retreat, until you are willing to divulge the secret you hold and point out the real murderer.

"Through the services of your ally, my friend now, Richard Doyle, I escaped, and in disguise we reached the far West.

"Richard has money saved up, and will seek the Pacific Coast somewhere and find an investment for it.

"From him I received the twenty-five hundred dollars you were so good as to loan me, and I assure you it is a great boon to me in my flight.

"It is my hope to return it to you at no distant day.

"At present I go to seek my mother, at a point where I feel sure I will find her, or hear of where she is, and I am certain that it is on account of her utter isolation from mails that she has not heard of my, but for you, fatal trouble; and now that I am free I realize that it is better so, for her sake.

"I hope some day, my dear Miss Dangerfield, you will let me prove my innocence to the world through the secret you hold of who is the real criminal.

"To your dear friend, Miss Kennerley, present my kindest remembrances and heartfelt thanks for the noble manner in which she aided you to befriend me, and Mr. Doyle joins me in regards to you both and every good wish for your happiness.

"Again, with deepest gratitude let me subscribe myself,

Faithfully yours,
"DARE SLOAN."

Such was the fugitive's letter, and it made a deep impression upon Anita Dangerfield.

All through it she could see that he felt more than gratitude toward her, and she asked:

"Kate, what do you think of his letter?"

"A manly one, surely; and more—pardon me for saying so: it shows his love for you."

"Oh, Kate!"

"I mean it, and I think it a shame that two such, as you and he, should be fated to a cruel separation in life, for I know, too, my dear Anita, that you are not indifferent to Dare Sloan, and I do not condemn you for it, either."

Anita made no reply, and soon after Kate asked:

"May I ask you a direct question?"

"Yes."

"Will you give me a direct answer?"

"I will."

"Mind you, I do not seek to pry into what you do not feel at liberty to tell me; but I wish to satisfy myself upon one point, Anita."

"Ask and I will answer you."

"You have said that you knew that Dare Sloan had not committed the murder for which he was sentenced?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who it was that did murder Squire Benson?"

A moment of silence and then distinctly came the words:

"I do!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

GONE WRONG.

DARKE DANGERFIELD arrived on the day he had written that he would.

As she greeted her father, Anita saw that something had gone wrong, for his face was stern and haggard.

After awhile he led the way to his library and said:

"I have been unfortunate in my mining investments of late, Anita, and lost heavily, so we will have to hedge to even things up, as for a year past I have been losing money, and Dean has cost me even more than you know."

"I can recuperate all right if I economize for a year or two, so we will sell this mansion and go to Daisy Dell Manor."

"With what I have in bank, and what this mansion and furniture will bring, I can pay all liabilities, and Daisy Dell will give us a handsome living for a couple of years, and in that time some of the mines may pan out richly."

"Then, too, we being at the Dell will be a check upon your brother, who has been going it very fast there, I am afraid."

"But my brother will be West, will he not? You did not bring him back with you?"

"Back with me! Why, is he not at the Dell?"

"No, father; Dean left over three weeks ago to join you."

"And why have I not seen him?"

"I do not know, sir; but he went to your headquarters direct."

"He has not been near me; but, why should he go there?"

"I will make a clean breast of it, father, and tell you that I sent him West."

"This is strange, Anita, and I shall certainly be glad to hear what you have to say."

"Now I recall it, did he go alone?"

"I fear not, sir, for I have reason to believe Hal Burton went with him."

"He did, for now I will tell you that I met Burton and spoke to him as he was near my office. His face flushed, but he said:

"You are mistaken, sir, for my name is not Burton."

"I apologized and went on, wondering at the likeness between the fellow and Burton."

"Well, sir, Mr. Burton is a fugitive from justice, having forged his aunt's name to a check and got the money on it just before brother left, and I wrote to Mr. Girard and learned that Dean had been at the club the night before his departure and had introduced a Mr. Burton."

"That settles it; but now to Dean."

"I have done that for which you may censure me, father; but it was only to do as I did or bring disgrace upon us. I will let you be the judge."

Then Anita told her father all that she had done about her brother—that she had gone to N—, paid his debts, taken up the forged note, and then sent him out to join his father.

Darke Dangerfield's brow grew black as a thundercloud as he listened, but he did not speak until she ended with:

"And it was just fifteen thousand dollars that he cost you, sir."

"And, at this time, it is a hard blow; but you acted for the best, and nobly, my dear child, and kept our name from dishonor."

"But where has he gone, and what will he do without money?"

"I know that he has some money, sir, for I gave him about three hundred dollars, and I have the accounts of the exact amount; but I am sure that he does not owe Burton a cent, for Isaac told me he carried a telegram to the office after I left, and he wrote it with a hard pencil on the pad, and I have read the message from the imprint. Here it is."

And she got the telegraph blank pad and handed it, with the accounts, to her father.

There he read the dispatch sent to Hal Burton by Dean Dangerfield.

"Yes, that was a false debt to get money out of you, I am sure."

"But it will not last him long, and he will soon be back demanding more of me."

"Father, pardon me if I say you have been weak where Dean is concerned, and parents generally are where their sons are involved; but let a daughter go wrong, how quickly she is shut out of the parental love and the pale of society!"

"You are right, my child, for it is really so."

"Now, I do not care a fig for any inheritance that may be mine; but I do say that as long as you give Dean money he will do nothing and depend on you."

"As for myself, if you lost every dollar you have, my education and accomplishments will make us a living, I know."

"I can work, too, my sweet child, for I am not an old man yet; but, let me see just what I have in bank, and we can quickly discover how we stand."

"We can put this house, furniture and equipages down at at least one hundred thousand,

and it will bring more; but we will say that sum, and what do you make our deposits?"

"Seventy-seven thousand, seven hundred dollars, sir, less fifteen thousand paid for Dean."

"Sixty-two thousand call it then, and with the home, one hundred and sixty-two thousand."

"Yes, sir; and the liabilities?"

"I have to pay in cash at once I may say, to save my credit, one hundred and fifty-five thousand."

"Two years ago that sum was nothing to me; but I have lost a million in mines and stocks."

"Well, sir, what you have clears you easily, and we can go to the Dell owing nothing."

"You did as I told you about the books?"

"Yes, sir; I got them from the banks to-day; but I have not looked at them—Ah! the Third City I see gives you a balance of only ten thousand, where I had it down twenty-two."

"And so it should be, as I remember, for I have drawn nothing from it."

"Look over the checks canceled, for all are surely in."

Anita glanced at the checks and her face paled, while she said:

"Father, here is a forgery."

"What?"

"A check for twelve thousand dollars, payable to Dean Dangerfield, dated at your mines out West, and indorsed by my brother."

"My God! he drew that before he went West!" and the now irate parent trembled in his anger.

"From this moment I disown him, for he is a villain, and no son of mine, no brother of yours!" and the low, quivering voice of the man showed how deeply he was moved by his son's disgrace, while Anita was too shocked to speak.

At last she said with a sigh:

"Yes, father, poor, unfortunate Dean has gone beyond all bounds, for—I can tell more!"

"But, let us settle this matter first, for it is not enough for your liabilities; but I have an account of my own, you remember, and it ran up to nearly eight thousand dollars. Five of that I now have, so it will, with this home and your deposits, pay all debts and no one will know that you have suffered losses."

"But he may have done more yet!" groaned the father who was so deeply hurt at the honor of his son.

"No, father; these balances are all correct now, and you know Mr. Girard has offered you often, a hundred thousand cash for this home as it stands, so you can get that to-morrow, and all will be well, pecuniarily; but I have something more to tell you—a confession to make, in fact."

"Nothing can surprise me now, my child, for I am fairly stunned at that mad boy's disgrace."

"But tell me what you would, for it must be important that you wish to speak now."

"It is important, father," and Anita drew her chair nearer, while she said:

"I will call Kate, for she knows all."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANITA'S CONFESSION.

WHEN Kate Kennerley had entered the library, Darke Dangerfield was sure that he was to hear a confession from his daughter that she was in love.

He had been willing for her to accept several of the fine offers she had received, though fearful that she would do so, loving her as devotedly as he did and hating to give her up; but that she had ever loved any one, he was confident was not the case. Now he felt sure that she had fallen in love; but he was not long in being undeceived.

"Father, have you read the papers of late, say about three weeks to two months ago?"

"I must confess that I have not, for I have been in the mountains for three months, where a paper seldom penetrated, my child. But why?"

"Then you do not know that there was a murder down at N—?"

"No, indeed! Who was killed?"

"Squire Benson."

"A fine old man and one whom I respected highly. You know, or rather you do not know, that he was said to be the real heir to Daisy Dell Estate, and some thought if he claimed his rights he could have gotten it, even if he contested my purchase of it, for he was the first cousin of Mrs. Dean, the mother of Mrs. Sloan, and rumor had it that a will of some relative had left it to him."

"But he did not claim it, and so, as the property of Mrs. Sloan's mother, it was offered

for sale to pay debts, and I bought it in. It is now worth ten times what I gave for it."

"But what about this murder, and who killed the old squire?"

"Dare Sloan was accused of it, father."

"Why, he is in the West somewhere, I have heard; and besides, I cannot believe him guilty of such a crime."

"I am glad to hear you say so, father, for I acted at first with the same belief in his innocence; but, let me tell you the whole story."

Anita then proceeded to tell of the fraud perpetrated by Loyd Lucas in selling Elmwood Hall, the failure of the bank in which the all of the Sloans had been deposited, and how Dare had come East to see if he could save anything from the wreck, and, meeting Squire Benson, what had followed.

"And who were they who arrested young Sloan?"

"Do you not think, sir, that he would be considered guilty, especially when the pistol, having one shot fired from it, was taken from young Mr. Sloan?"

"It would look so, surely; but appearances often deceive, and yet I fear a jury will find him guilty."

"He has been found guilty, and was sentenced to be hanged; but he escaped."

"Ha! this was quick work indeed! But you did not tell me who it was that arrested Sloan."

"My brother and Mr. Burton."

Darke Dangerfield started, his dark face paled and became more stern, while he said:

"And they were the only witnesses?"

"Yes, with the pistol and the general appearance of guilt."

Mr. Dangerfield shook his head, and then asked:

"But, how did he escape?"

"That is my confession, father."

And Anita told of just what she had done, adding:

"I was anxious to save him, doubting his guilt, and because I owed my life to him, as did also Kate and my brother."

"Then I learned—no matter how—that Dare was not the murderer. But, more on this subject hereafter, as I cannot tell you or any one that secret; it must remain locked up in my heart, and no one must share it."

"You know that I had some money of my own deposited in bank. I took this out, expecting to bribe the guards; but I found one who would not take the bribe, for he too owed a debt of gratitude to Mr. Sloan such as I and Dean and Kate owe."

"That saved me the five thousand, and I now will turn it over to you; but twenty-five hundred of it I gave to the guard for Mr. Sloan, knowing his necessities, and telling him to take it as a loan."

"You did right, my daughter."

"Here is the letter he wrote me, so you see he is safe, and how he regards the money as a loan."

"Now, father, I have confessed all."

"And I uphold you fully, my child, and congratulate you and Kate upon your splendid work. You have proven yourself worthy to be chief of a detective bureau; but, about this knowledge of Sloan's innocence?"

"Do not ask me, father, for my lips are sealed; as I have said, I must bear the secret alone."

Darke Dangerfield looked fixedly into his daughter's face; but she did not flinch, and with a strange expression upon his countenance he turned away.

The next day Darke Dangerfield called upon his friend, Mr. Girard, and told him he could have his city mansion for the price he had offered, as he was going to reside upon his country estate.

Mr. Girard gave him a check for the amount, and what things Anita cared to remove were sent to Daisy Dell.

The liabilities due were promptly paid, with the aid of Anita's five thousand, and all outstanding household debts were liquidated in full, and a grim smile crossed the face of Darke Dangerfield as he said, the day after their arrival at the farm:

"Well, Anita, we have Daisy Dell Manor unincumbered, and just two thousand dollars in bank."

"Yes, father, we are well off indeed, and but for the fact that poor Dean has gone to the bad, I could be happy."

"Never mention his name to me again, Anita, but banish him from your heart and thoughts as I shall from mine."

"If I only could!" murmured Anita as she turned sadly away, and went to look after her household affairs, determined, however, that

her father should never see the clouds in her heart reflected upon her face, as she said:

"For he, too, has sorrows to bear—a lost love, as I now know, and a grave in the heart that can never be effaced."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

KATE KENNERLEY returned to her happy home from the city, when Anita and her father left for Daisy Dell Manor; but she went with a feeling of sympathy and pain for her dearly loved friend which she could not banish, even when surrounded by her many admirers.

At Daisy Dell all went on in the even tenor of its way, its master devoting himself to the care of his estate with an energy that seemed to keep him contented if not happy.

Judge Verdan was a frequent visitor at the Dell, often staying to dinner and remaining all night, and, at the request of Darke Dangerfield, he had purchased Elmwood Hall, its owner never having occupied it, and let it to the master of the Dell to farm, until he could himself buy it as he expressed a wish to do.

Although in N—nothing had been heard of Dean Dangerfield and Hal Burton, it was surmised that the former had been disowned, for some reason, by his father, and so his name was never spoken by visitors to the Manor.

Not a word either had ever come of Dare Sloan and Richard Doyle; but the latter had gone to what was then Washington Territory, and established himself in a business that was paying him well, while the former had made his way to the ranch of Buck Brandon, the cowboy.

He found Buck established upon his small ranch, with a herd of cattle about him and thus laying the foundation of future fortune.

From Buck he heard the story of the visit of the Red Witch to the farm, and how the Widow Sloan had bade him follow her.

This he had done, and returned to report that she had gone to a mining-camp in Colorado, and thither Dora Sloan had, at once, started, getting full directions from the cowboy.

A letter had come for Dare Sloan to follow her, and he did so, to at last find her in a mining-camp, and mistress of a paying mine which she had secured.

But, though the mine panned out well, neither Dare nor his mother cared to return East to enjoy their wealth, for the shadow of the gallows yet hung over the young miner, he well knew, and the reason why was still kept by Anita; only her lips could speak the words which would take the brand of murder from his brow.

But, Dare had discovered the terrible secret which she kept locked up in her own heart.

It was, that Dean Dangerfield was the murderer of old Squire Benson!

THE END.

Beadle's Half-Dime Library.

BY COL. A. F. HOLT.

817 *Wideawake*, the Train-boy Detective.
811 *Headlight Harry's Flyer*; or, Duke Derby.
673 *Headlight Harry's Hazard*.
691 *Headlight Harry's Haul*; or, The Railroad Pards.
727 *Headlight Harry's Siren*; or, Mad Madge.
759 *Headlight Harry's Heritage*.
794 *Headlight Harry's Hunt*; or, The Cache of Gold.
899 *Black Buckskin*; or, The Masked Men of Death Canyon.
419 *Kenneth*, the Knife-King; or, The Doomed Six.
435 *Little Lightfoot*, the Pilot of the Woods.
523 *The Dandy Sport*; or, The King Pin Conspirator.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. Wm. F. Cody).

8 *Kansas King*; or, The Red Right Hand.
19 *The Phantom Spy*; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
55 *Deadly-Eye*, the Unknown Scout; or, The Banded Brotherhood.
68 *Border Robin Hood*; or, The Prairie Rover.
158 *Fancy Frank of Colorado*; or, The Trapper's Trust.

BY BUCKSKIN SAM (Major Sam. S. Hall.)

234 *Old Rocky's "Boyees"*; or, Benito, the Horse-Breaker.
246 *Giant George*; or, The Ang'l of the Range.
275 *Arizona Jack*; or, Giant George's Pard.
297 *The Tarantula of Taos*; or, Giant George's Revenge.
307 *The Strange Pard*; or, Little Ben's Death Hunt.
318 *Ker-whoop, Ker-whoop*; or, The Tarantula of Taos.
327 *Creeping Cat, the Caddo*; or, The Red and White Pards.
332 *Frio Fred*; or, The Tonkaway's Trust.
344 *The Fighting Trio*; or, Rattlesnake, the Tonkaway.
349 *Wild Wolf*; or, Big-Foot Wallace to the Front.
357 *The Ranch Raiders*; or, The Siege of Fort Purgatory.
364 *Snap-Shot, the Boy Ranger*.
375 *Chiota, the Creek*; or, The Three Thunderbolts.
381 *Bandera Bill*; or, Frio Frank to the Front.
392 *Romeo and the Reds*; or, The Beleaguered Ranch.
404 *Little Larlat*; or, Pecan Pete's Big Rampage.
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